BY THE AUTHOR OF "DUKE OF KANDOS" &c

THE TWO DUCHESSES

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TWO DUCHESSES

FROM THE FRENCH OF

A. MATHEY

BY

FRANK PINCKNEY CLARK

LONDON:
JOHN & ROBERT MAXWELL
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THE TWO DUCHESSES

THE SEQUEL AND END OF

THE DUKE OF KANDOS.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE DEAD MEET AGAIN.

AT the end of the first day of this recital we left Cuchillo and Mariquita at the moment in which they had once more met, at the moment when the recognition of him made her drop the knife which she had brought with her to plunge into the heart of her husband, Paul de Kandos.

Mariquita, deceived, like the rest of the world, by the inquest held in Buenos Ayres two years before, had believed in Cuchillo's death as firmly as he had believed in hers.

On finding each other still living, the principal feeling, to the entire exclusion of every other sentiment, was one of the deepest surprise.

Cuchillo experienced a kind of superstitious terror, while the *marquesa*, after a first cry of astonishment, asked where was the duke. But the request was

purely mechanical. It was only an echo of a fierce desire which had suddenly ceased to exist in the presence of the reality, and which had given place to new and very different sensations.

So, without listening to, or even hearing, Cuchillo, when he said, in a voice of terror: "Be silent! oh, be silent, unhappy woman?" she exclaimed, her face illuminated by a great joy and full of new hope and love:

"You, Cuchillo, found again? you, whom I believed lost forever, and whose death I came to avenge, as well as, and even more, than the other crimes committed by this wretch—this Paul?"

While speaking, she seized his hands, her black eyes full of fire and joy.

"Yes, Mariquita," said he, in a state of distraction, "it is, indeed, I; but, speak lower, I beg of you. Is it possible that you are alive? How does it happen?"

"I will tell you—presently—but let me enjoy my present happiness for a moment in feeling you once more near me! Look! here is he who saved me," she added, showing him Mono, the negro, who had retired into a dark corner and, motionless and silent, assisted at this strange scene.

Cuchillo suddenly turned around. He had forgotten the presence of this new witness, and he shuddered with terror at the thought that still another had heard him, and had learned his secret.

"Oh! my God!" he murmured, to Mariquita, "send him away—I am lost if he learns, if he understands—"

"Do not be afraid. He is faithful and mute. He knows all my secrets; he even knows you, yourself, having seen you at Buenos Ayres, where I kept him near me. It is a history which I will relate to you—later on. But, let us leave that subject now. In fact, you pass for the duke——" She paused, trembling, with dilated nostrils. "Whose, then, was the body they found on the *pampa*, in the *corral*, and which they took for yours?"

"Can you ask, Mariquita?"

"Was it *his?*"

"Yes!"

"Who killed him?"

"I!"

"Why?"

"To avenge you; to punish the murderer for the horrible death he had made you suffer!"

"Ah! thanks, Cuchillo! Yes, *you* are a man; the only one I have, or ever shall love! Ah! you avenged me. You see that I, too, came, in my turn, to avenge you. Do you know that it was because of you that he wished to kill me?"

"Yes, yes, I know!" feebly murmured Cuchillo, plunged in the most frightful trouble that he had ever experienced; delivered over to a chaos of the most violent and contradictory sentiments; happy and desperate, both at once, at seeing her still alive, understanding that his life had now entered on a new phase, the complications of which he dared not look into. Moreover, he was moved by this warm passion, although incapable of responding to the love which was ended for him.

"And did he know by whose hand he perished? Did he know who you were, what you were, and why you struck the blow?"

"Yes, yes! he knew it all. But I did not wish to assassinate him. Oh, no—no! My God! if you only knew!——"

"What then?"

"I provoked him—I wished to punish him—I was a judge—not an executioner. We fought with knives—he wounded me——"

"Ah! the wretch! Killing him once was not enough!"

"I was about to succumb——"

Mariquita shuddered, and her black eyes flashed with wrath.

"When Louis Clermont saved me. He had caught the other's arm, and I plunged my *navaja* twice into his breast before I saw or understood that he was defenseless, blinded as I was by fury."

Cuchillo's voice trembled, and his face became pale in recalling the duel, ending in assassination.

The *Portena* regarded him with astonishment.

"One would think you regretted it!" said she.

"Mariquita, do you know who he was?"

"Paul de Kandos?"

"Yes."

"He was my enemy and yours."

Cuchillo lowered his voice:

"*He was my brother!*"

"*Your brother!*" she repeated. "Are you mad?"

"Alas! I am only too sane. But, look at me. Do you not see the wonderful resemblance which allowed his corpse to be taken for mine, and which has since permitted——"

Mariquita hastily caught up the lamp placed on the table, turned the light on full, and gazed for a moment on Cuchillo's distracted features.

"It is true!" she finally said. "Yes, the resemblance is striking, and I now understand why, the first time I saw you—it seemed to me as if I had met you before. Yes, yes, I now understand it, and how I was unable to account for it." She looked at him again. "But now it is plain to me! Well, in spite of the resemblance, I love you none the less. He was handsome, and I hated him—you are handsome, and I adore you!" She paused, but soon resumed: "Ah! he was your brother! I believe I love you all the more for it. The vengeance is still the more complete."

"Mariquita, you frighten me!"

"Hush, you are only a child!"

And she took his head between her two hands, caressing him with her velvety eyes, and warming him with her breath, which had in it something of the heat of the *pampa*.

"We have met again; we are reunited. What matters the rest? But I understand now. It is true, you are the duke; you bear his title, which is yours also, is it not? since you had the same father. Yes, it is all very simple. The old man recognized you. That is what deceived me, and came near making you die by my hand." She smiled. "I was going to kill you, in order to prove how I loved you."

"No, the old duke did not recognize me," replied Cuchillo, in a hollow, trembling voice. "He took me for—my brother—his legitimate son—and it was on his death-bed that he revealed this abominable secret to me."

"Explain yourself, my friend."

"You know that I am the son of Marie Pruneau, a poor working-girl, abandoned by the father of her child. Well! the man who seduced and then deserted the poor girl was the Duke of Kandos."

"The old wretch!" said, with conviction, Mariquita, who had hated him.

"He confided it to me in his death agony, taking me for the other—begging me to seek for the child and to assist him. On hearing this frightful revelation, which made of me a sort of monster—I told him all—I cursed him, and he died in despair, calling me 'assassin!' and crying for help!"

Mariquita shrugged her shoulders.

"Pshaw!" softly said she. "You knew nothing about it. You are not to blame; it was his fault. Besides, what does it matter? To have saved or to have avenged you do you not believe that I would have killed my own sister, if I had had one? One should defend, save and avenge those whom one loves. One can easily die for them! Haven't I proved that to you?"

She led him to the table, made him sit down in his chair, took a low one (in which Jeanne was seated near her husband the first time we met her, at the beginning of this true history) and placing it near his, said:

"Listen, we must see clearly into the situation of affairs. There are things in all that you have related which I hardly understand. I knew you as a *gaucho* on the *pampa*, without family and almost without name, and as an escaped galley-slave, fearing justice and concealing yourself. I now find you with the title of duke, impersonating Paul de Kandos, and a son of the old duke. Tell me the whole in detail. Then I will tell you how I was saved and come to be

in Paris under the name of Dolorès de Los Rias, while all the world believes Maria Antequerra, the *prima-donna* of the Buenos Ayres theatre, to be dead."

CHAPTER II.

WHICH OUTLINES THE SITUATION.

THIS detailed account which Mariquita demanded of him was the thing Cuchillo most dreaded. For, even without having been able to examine closely into his situation as regarded the genuine Duchess of Kandos, he felt how perilous and terrible it would be to tell the truth to this ardent and vindictive woman, whose love for him had not in the least grown cold.

He would have liked to have had a few hours of solitude in which to analyze his position and adopt a plan of action. But to ask for this delay was as impossible as it was to decline Mariquita's very natural request.

Meanwhile, she silently waited, her eyes fixed upon him; and a longer delay would have been dangerous, as much so as the whole truth.

"Well!" said he, with an effort, seeking for words, and not daring to meet the gaze fixed upon him, "you know almost the whole of it, now."

"Not at all; how did you learn the name of Paul de Kandos? How did you happen to meet each other? How did you conceive and execute the plan, the triumphant carrying out of which I see before me? Above all, how did you discover that he was the author of the fire and the attempted murder at my house, since all the world was, and still is, ignorant of it?"

"You shall know," replied Cuchillo, only too glad to speak of those distant events, painful as they were to him.

"The day following the one on which—Paul, after having stabbed you, set fire to the house in order to destroy the traces of his crime, a man, a dismounted

horseman, dying from fatigue, hunger and thirst, arrived about nightfall at the *corral* where Clermont and I were, and demanded hospitality of us, which we accorded without asking him any questions, as is customary on the campo.

"I was then ignorant of the frightful drama which had been enacted and of which you had been the victim.

"At daybreak Clermont departed for Buenos-Ayres. When he returned he at first dared not tell me the terrible news he had heard there, where every one was weeping for you."

"Yes, they loved me!" said she, proudly.

"But," pursued Cuchillo, "by an incredible chance it happened that Clermont had lived at the old duke's, where, for some months, he had taught fencing and horsemanship to Paul de Kandos. On seeing him again by daylight, he recognized him, and at the same time, noticed the wonderful resemblance which existed between this man and myself. Then was born, almost instantaneously, in his fertile brain—always ready for evil—the abominable drama which I am now playing.

"He immediately conceived the plan of substituting me for the real marquis. But to do that the latter must disappear forever. His death was then resolved upon by Clermont, who, although ignorant that he was your husband, already suspected him of being the author of the fire in which you were supposed to have perished. He laid a snare for him, into which he fell, and soon got a confession from the unfortunate—"

"From the wretch, you mean!"

"Whilst embracing him and swearing affection and devotion towards him, he forced him to relate his entire life to us.

"As for me, I knew nothing; I was ignorant that there was a de Kandos family, the son of which was your husband. I did not even know that you were married. He related his whole life, his first meeting with you—."

"When I walked the rope at Anvers; I remember."

"His passion for the little rope-dancer, his marriage, your quarrels, your daughter's birth, and your flight with one of his friends."

"My daughter, that is true!—where is she? What has become of her? I have thought of her more than once; and if my life had permitted it I would have liked to have seen her; but, poor child!—it is better that she has not known me. I haven't much of the maternal feeling. Besides, I so hated and despised her father! She was with the duke, I knew she was happy, beyond need, well educated and virtuously brought up. She is with you, at present, is she not?"

"Yes."

"Is she pretty?"

"Charming! she resembles you somewhat."

"I will see her, now, joyfully, and I think I may be able to love her."

Cuchillo shivered from head to foot.

"Continue," resumed the *Marquesa;* "we will speak of this again, later."

"I listened to the marquis, a prey to the most varied sentiments. After having sympathized with him during the recital of his sad childhood, he became detestable to me the moment I knew he was your husband.

"Finally, he came to his meeting with you at Buenos Ayres, when he saw you in the *rôle* of *la Favorite* at the theater. He described the scene of your meeting, his prayers, and your absolute refusal. He told the story of his infamy; of his hideous and cowardly revenge."

Cuchillo paused a moment, and then resumed:

"I believed you dead; that you died in the cruelest manner. I insulted and provoked him, telling him who I was, and that I was going to kill him. He joyfully accepted the proposed duel. No, he was not a coward, Mariquita."

"Possibly; so much the better for him! And then?"

"There happened what had been foreseen and prepared by Clermont, who wished that I should be his

murderer. We threw ourselves on each other, armed with our *navajas.* He wounded me in the side. I would, perhaps, have succumbed—when Clermont threw a lasso around his arm, I rushed forward. I stabbed him twice! He fell, calling me 'Assassin!' And he was my brother."

"That is, it was he who had taken your place in life; for you were the eldest. A knife-thrust has put things in their proper place. It was Justice, friend. Be a man, and don't worry yourself about it. But finish."

"You know the rest; he was dead, and I was wounded. Clermont explained his plan to me. I accepted it. I consented to become his accomplice. I accepted the spoils of bloodshed. My clothes were put on him; I took his, and his papers; Clermont shaved off his beard, for at that time I wore none. I let mine grow in order to resemble him still more, and we made our escape!"

"Yes—yes; I now understand," said Mariquita, "the error into which everyone has fallen. This error which has made me shed so many tears, and has made me a widow for two years; not of the husband whom I believed living, but of the lover whom I adored! Ah! although dead, I still hate him for the evil he has done me; and for the despair I have suffered while believing him your assassin!"

"Him?"

"Certainly. I believed that he, assisted by Clermont, had killed you. But you cannot understand me without knowing what happened, what became of me, and what I did after having escaped from the abominable death prepared for me."

"Why did I not know that you were alive?" exclaimed Cuchillo, overcome by a thousand feelings. "Why has no one ever told me that you were saved? This is, to me, an inexplicable mystery.

"When I arrived at the duke's in *Franche-Comté*, he had received the news of your death; he had received official information of it—and you can imagine that he did not grieve——"

"Yes, he hated me; and the news must have given him great pleasure. That was what I wished!"

"You wished——"

"I wished that he should remain ignorant of my existence, and that Paul de Kandos, convinced of my death, should sleep in the hope of impunity. I, the victim, concealed myself as a murderer would. I employed every method for effacing my personality, and to make myself disappear so completely that no one would ever suspect I lived."

"Why was that?"

"Why? You ask such a question? Because I thirsted for revenge! Because I wished to punish your murderer!"

"You had but to denounce him!"

"Never! What! Charge lazy and indifferent Justice with punishing him whom I hated, who had made me desperate, whom I believed covered with blood, who blasted my life and my career——"

"Your career?"

"Yes; for the terror and excitement I passed through ruined my voice. I can no longer sing nor appear on the stage. I am ruined. For two years I have lived on the proceeds of the sale of my jewels, the lost remnants of my past splendor."

"Poor Mariquita!" exclaimed Cuchillo, with a sincere burst of sympathy and generosity.

"You understand me now. What I wanted was personal revenge. Believing me dead, I thought that he would not try to conceal himself—that I could reach him easily. And I have arrived at his home—you have seen how. Not without difficulty, however; for I had lost all trace of him in Paris. And it is you whom I have found! Oh! I no longer feel my sorrows, nor yours! This unexpected hour repays all. He is punished, as he should have been—and we are here together!"

CHAPTER III.

IRMA, THE NEGRO'S MOTHER.

"AH! Mariquita!" exclaimed Cuchillo, seizing her hands with genuine affection and despairing grief, "why did I not know all this sooner? My life would have been different!"

He was thinking of Jeanne, of the marriage which so terribly complicated the situation, and, all the more, that he loved Jeanne with his whole heart.

"We both played the same game," replied she, "and were mutually deceived."

"What passed after your husband made his escape?"

"After having stabbed me twice, he set fire to the apartment we were in, and disappeared without my perceiving how—I had fainted? But I had had time to utter a cry of distress first. I would have been lost if Mono, this brave and faithful Mono, who occupied a neighboring chamber, where he awaited my orders, had not hastened to my aid. He seized me in his arms, and with a vigorous hand, not stopping for burns or pain, he put out my night-dress which was just beginning to catch fire. But my blood was flowing freely, and I was still unconscious."

Cuchillo arose with a bound, ran towards Mono, still silent and motionless in the dark corner where he had placed himself, and seizing his hands, said, in a voice of emotion:

"It was grand—that was true courage and devotion! Thanks!"

"She had saved me—I saved her," simply responded the negro.

"Yes, his is a brave heart," pursued Marquita. "He is grateful and obedient. But hear the rest."

Cuchillo returned to his seat. The light of joy and enthusiasm which had animated his face suddenly died out. Since he had found himself once more in the presence of the *Portena*, he passed suddenly from one sentiment to another: in turn, profoundly happy at seeing still living her whom he had loved; and then frightened at the consequences of her resurrection, and the impossibility of realizing her dreams of the future.

"Then," she resumed, "Mono, without thinking of anything else, laid me on a sofa, and examined my wounds. Made by an unsure hand, they were not very deep. The loss of blood had also helped to save me. Reassured in this respect, Mono tried to bring me to my senses by throwing water in my face. This took some minutes. When I finally reopened my eyes a frightful spectacle met my sight—the fire surrounded us both."

"How was that?"

"The fire had continued its work, and communicated the flames to the furniture. The house, as you know, was entirely built of wood. In a few minutes it was burning like a boxes of matches."

"Yes, I can understand that; but did not Mono notice it?"

"No; fearing I was dead, only occupying himself with me and attending to my wounds, he had forgotten everything else. It was, therefore, I, who, on opening my eyes, first perceived the new danger which, by this time, threatened both of us. The room was literally aflame; from the curtains the flames had spread to the windows, and then to the walls. It ate into the ceiling. It encroached on the floor through the candles which had escaped from the candelabra. The door was now only the entrance to an oven."

"Frightful!" murmured the false duke, even terrified by the description.

"I uttered a cry of horror, and bounded to my feet.

"'Look!' said I to Mono. He raised his eyes, which he had hitherto kept on mine, saw, and understood. There was a moment of stupor. I felt that he was afraid, or rather in despair, for he could think of no way of escape from the frightful death which on all sides surrounded us and advanced upon us, gradually enclosing us in a smaller circle.

"Let us escape! Save me!" I cried to him, like a mad woman.

"'Yes, mistress,' he replied, 'you shall be saved!'

"Then, shaking his head, like a man resolved and who had found a way, he tore from his body the loose wollen coat he wore, the half-burned sleeves of which left bare the wounds on his arms—"

Cuchillo made a gesture of surprise.

"You don't understand! It is, nevertheless, very simple. My hair was all in disorder. It is very long, you remember, and, flowing over my shoulders, it covered me. The least spark would set it ablaze and kill me, or, which is perhaps worse, disfigure me."

"Well!"

"Eh, well! he wrapped my hair about me, and covered me with his jacket, thus concealing my head and face; seized me in his arms, and, protecting my body with his own, he leaped through the flames, with a single prodigious bound, into the garden outside, without my experiencing anything worse than the frightful heat of the furnace we had passed through. I fainted again."

Cuchillo listened with breathless interest to this dramatic recital, thinking only of the perils of this adorable woman, for whom he had formerly felt such a violent love.

"Continue! continue!" he said in a voice of emotion.

"When I returned to my senses, I was in a strange room; not only poverty-stricken, but wounded and helpless, stretched on a straw bed. Near me an old negress was preparing a draught, a few drops of which she made me swallow, as soon as she saw I had regained consciousness. I don't know what this cordial

was composed of, but its effect was instantaneous. It sent a thrill of pleasure through my veins and restored my full strength, both physically and mentally. I arose to a sitting posture.

"'Where am I?' I asked.

"'You are at Irma's,' replied the old negress.

"'Who is Irma?'

"'I, the *mother of the blacks!*'

"I understood at once. You know that *La Plata* is not very far from Brazil, where slavery exists! Runaway slaves are sometimes able to gain the Argentine Republic, where they become free. But they are unable to reach Buenos Ayres, except at the price of the cruelest fatigue and the greatest peril.

"It is then that they betake themselves to Irma, the *mother of the blacks*, herself a former slave, who keeps a sort of house of refuge, known to all the slaves of Brazil, and sustained by a sort of free masonry. When their escape is forgotten, and their trace lost, they go into some distant province, where they find means of earning a living.

"Mono, on bringing me out of the fire, without troubling himself to call for help, had instinctively run with me to Irma's for shelter, having confidence in the medicinal secrets of the old woman, and her ability to cure me, and certain that I would be received there, cared for and surrounded with more attention, on his recommendation, than anywhere else. Moreover, he wished, above all, to secure me a place of safety from the assassin who had so nearly killed me.

"It was this idea of Mono's which decided my later resolutions, and allowed me to adopt the plan which made you, like everyone else, believe that I was dead.

"I had known of Irma's existence, without knowing where she lived; for that is a secret which the negroes carefully preserve.

"'Where is Mono?' I immediately asked.

"'In the next room. He is dressing his wounds,' answered the old negress.

"'Are they serious?'

"'They will not endanger his life, and my ointment

will cure them in a few days. But he had two large burns on his arms, and his feet had been partly roasted.'

"In fact, in passing through the flames, he must have actually walked on coals.

"As to me, thanks to his precautions, I was safe and sound."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MARIQUITA BECAME DOLORÉS.

"I COMMENCE to have a glimpse of what passed," interrupted Cuchillo, with a pre-occupied air.

"It is, in fact, extremely simple. While Mono carried me off fainting, the fire had continued its work of destruction, and was aided by the wind from the *pampa*, which had commenced to blow, and which was, by the following day, a genuine tempest.

The alarm not having been given, no one remarked the fire until the house was a mass of flames, and could no longer be saved or even entered.

"They were ignorant of my safety. They knew I had returned home after the theatre, and believed I had perished. In the morning nothing but a pile of cinders remained of the pretty little *chalet*, which had been one of the curiosities of Buenos Ayres."

"But where were your women servants all this time?"

"Both were happily absent. You remember that all this was in carnival time. On returning home I had dismissed them for the night, and they had gone to a masked ball held by the negroes, half-breeds, and natives, and they knew nothing of the fire till their return in the morning. They, like all who had known me, wept for me."

"There is one thing I am unable to explain to myself," interrupted Cuchillo; "it is Mono's presence. I did not know you had a man-servant—I never saw him."

"Because I concealed him."

"Why was that?"

"He was an escaped slave, and had run away from Brazil after having stabbed his master, who, by bad treatment, had killed a young negress whom Mono loved."

"Well?"

"Well, it was I who helped him to escape, and, concealing him, brought him with me when I left Brazil. You remember that I played at Rio Janeiro during an entire season?"

"Certainly—"

"Now, I had intended to return to Brazil, where I had met with great success. But if they had known the part I had taken in Mono's flight, if they had known that I had helped a runaway slave, and also a rebellious one, who had killed his master, all return to Brazil on my part would have been impossible. I therefore concealed poor Mono as best I could, for I desired that his existence, and above all his presence in my house, should remain unknown. You see, I performed a good action, and they are sometimes recompensed. Without this one, I would have perished —and all would have been ended." She smiled. "Fortunately, Mono was there; Mono, who was attached to me through gratitude; Mono, who in Rio Janeiro had frequently brought me messages from his master, one of my warmest admirers—whom I execrated; Mono, who would have given, and would still give, his life for me. Isn't it true?" she added, addressing the negro.

"Yes, mistress, you know it!" he softly replied.

"So," she pursued, "I was living while everyone believed me dead;—but I lived full of anger and a thirst for revenge against him who had tried to kill me in such a frightful way. Through Irma I was kept informed of all that happened and all that was said concerning this event. I thus learned that Paul de Kandos had disappeared after the fire, and that no one knew nor suspected he was the author of it, or even knew of his existence.

"Then, I suddenly discovered that I had lost my voice."

"Yes, you have already told me that. It is true, then?"

"Alas! it is only too true," responded Mariquita, with a touch of anger and bitterness; "yes, my career as an artist is over. I will never sing again, never again! Adieu to the intoxications and triumphs of the stage! Adieu fortune, applause and public enthusiasm! The excitement and fright had taken away my voice."

"But cannot this be cured?"

"No; I have consulted, I have tried all, and followed all treatments. Mariquita lives, but the nightingale is dead!"

"Poor Mariquita!"

"At first I believed it was only a temporary loss, and I did not regret it so very much. For a long while I had dreamed of living altogether with you, or, at least, having you always near me. You had never wished it. You said that my fortune frightened you, and you refused to be my debtor——"

Cuchillo made a gesture.

"Oh! you were right!" she exclaimed. "I desired it, and yet if you had accepted, I would have had a contempt for you. But, now I was poor. The theater, and success of every kind, was lost to me. My dream returned to me, sweeter and more imperious than ever. 'I will go and seek him on the *Pampa!*' I said to myself. 'I will cry to him, throwing myself on his neck: "I am here! I have nothing but you. You would not share of my riches and triumphs, so I come to share your poverty and obscurity."'"

"You wished that?"

"Yes, Cuchillo, I wished it! They would not seek me there, I would be lost on the *campo*. I was going to have you informed, you, alone, you understand, that I was living, when suddenly the rumor reached me that your corpse had been found. Through Irma and Mono I was kept informed of everything. Doubt was impossible. The *gauchos* had recognized your body.

The description given was exact. I thought I should die of grief and despair."

Cuchillo listened to these details with an emotion easily understood; he was touched by this love, whose ardor frightened him, not knowing what he would dare say to her, presently, when the moment for final explanations came.

"You had been killed! Who had killed you? Louis Clermont's disappearance made me suspect him immediately. But, knowing both your lives and your friendship for each other, I could not explain to myself what had induced him to commit this crime. I had two to avenge; but my own injuries were of the least importance to me. But, to avenge you, I must know the truth. In the first place, this confirmed me in my resolution to keep my existence a secret. In this way I would be freer to act, and no one would suspect the actor.

"Through Irma and Mono I had at my disposal all the blacks of the Argentine Republic. The most intelligent set themselves to work, not knowing that it was for me, but simply in obedience to their *mother*.

"In this way I soon learned what the police of Buenos Ayres had failed to discover; that, on the night of the fire, a man, whom I recognized from his description as Paul de Kandos, had fled to the *campo*. They followed his trail. It was discovered that an unknown *gaucho* had been seen at the *corral* with you and Clermont. All became clear to me. 'Paul knew that Cuchillo was my lover,' I said to myself; for everybody knew it, and he wished to complete his vengeance.

"Our two causes now became one. I had to punish for two crimes the same man."

"In fact," murmured Cuchillo, "the mistake was inevitable."

"For months I was without news. Finally, after a long period, I learned that two individuals, resembling those I pursued, had been seen on board of a vessel, in the harbor of Rio Janeiro, about starting for Europe——"

"That was really true," interrupted the false duke.

"My plans were laid immediately. My death was proved officially. So well proven that I was already forgotten. I adopted a false name, Dolorés de Los Rios; through the instrumentality of Irma I procured false passports, and made ready to depart, in my turn, for Europe, determined to avenge us both."

"But how did you manage to live without resources? How could you bear the expense of such a voyage, when you had lost everything? But you told me that you had sold your former jewels."

"It is all true, though apparently contradictory. You know I have never been saving. What I earned I spent. The only treasure I possessed were some jewels worth a large sum. The greater portion of these were lost in the fire. But some, the most valuable, were shut up in a little iron casket. One day, I don't know why, I had an attack of prudence. I said to myself: 'This will do for a rainy day,' in case any misfortune or illness should overtake me. I confided them to Mono, telling him at the same time that I wished to remain ignorant as to where they were placed. Without that precaution I might, in a moment of caprice, have taken them back and perhaps sold them."

"Well?"

"Well, Mono had deposited them with Irma, where I had now refound them. That is the only sensible idea I ever had in my life. They and the solitaires which were in my ears were worth about three hundred thousand *francs*. I have lived on this for two years; but I am not accustomed to economy. It was expensive following the track of the marquis, or rather yours, from America to Europe, to France, to Franche-Comté, and finally to Paris. I have only about twenty thousand francs left."

"This money finished, what would have become of you?"

"Oh! it mattered little to me! My vengeance accomplished, I do not know what I would have done."

"And this is the way you have reached me?"

"Yes, but owing to very strange circumstances, and if it had not been for the murder of *Coco, the Death's Head*, by Louis Clermont, I would not have yet found you."

Cuchillo bounded to his feet.

"What, you know of this crime!" he murmured in a stifled voice.

"Evidently, since it is the knowledge of this crime which has led me here."

Cuchillo gazed at her in a state of stupefaction.

CHAPTER V.

MAY, 1869.

NOW, a great terror mastered every other sentiment in Cuchillo's mind. If the *Portena* knew who had killed Coco, others might know it also. They would arrest the murderer, and all would be lost. This was a frightful idea!

Mariquita perceived his emotion.

"Oh! reassure yourself!" she exclaimed. "I, alone, possess the secret, and, if Clermont has not been arrested, if he has escaped from the police without leaving any trace; if he is not suspected now, and if he has nothing to fear, nor you either—he owes it to me."

"To you?" asked Cuchillo, surprised.

"Yes, to me! or rather to Mono! knowing that Clermont was with the duke, Mono saved him in order that through him I might learn the duke's whereabouts, without mixing justice up in the affair, in which he would assume the *rôle* I had reserved for myself."

"Mono saved him—" repeated the false duke, "and Clermont told me nothing of it."

"He did not know it."

"Is it possible?"

"Chance did it all. We had been in Paris two

months seeking in vain for any trace of the Duke of Kandos. Not wishing to appear in public, nor to seek information from the police, this search was far from easy. Finally, some days ago, about dusk, Mono encountered Louis Clermont, disguised as a working-man, and, with the acute instinct belonging to negroes, immediately recognized him. He cautiously followed him to the door of a house, in *Trois-Couronnes* street, which your friend entered. Mono patiently waited, concealed by the shadow of the building. Suddenly pistol-shots broke the silence. A crowd collected. The janitor came out to summon the police, and my faithful servant, gliding through the crowd, entered the house. He helped to break down the door, and recognized the corpse of *Coco*, whom he had often seen at Buenos Ayres in company with Clermont. The latter had escaped by the roof. Mono hastened in pursuit to prevent others doing the same, resolved, if he could, to prevent his arrest, so that I might find out what had become of the duke. He followed his tracks, at the risk of his life, and arrived at a garret, in which he found this navaja."

She drew forth the knife and showed it to Cuchillo, saying:

"Do you recognize it?"

"Yes," said he.

"The room in which he picked it up was in the greatest disorder, and everywhere gave tokens of the murderer's passage. Mono gained the stairway, and discoved that Clermont had found a refuge with some unknown people on the floor below, who had concealed him——"

"Ah! I comprehend!" said Cuchillo. "He was——"

"With his wife and son! Madame, and Gaston Lapierre!"

"You know all, then?"

"Yes. But listen. When the police came to search the house, Mono re-ascended the stairs, put everything in place in the garret, and effaced all the traces of Clermont's presence——"

"Then no one suspects him?"

"Nobody in the world!"

Cuchillo uttered a sigh of relief.

"The next day Mono informed me of his discovery, and gave me all these details. Ah! but I was happy for a moment! Clermont refound, I was sure of finding the duke, whose accomplice I believed him to be."

"But you did not know where he was!"

"That was nothing! I knew who had concealed him; and soon I knew that the person who had given him an asylum in the house in Oberkampf street was called Madame Lapierre; that she was none other than Madame Clermont; that she was as honest a woman as there was in the world, and that she had dropped her married name, a name dishonored by the life and deeds of her husband. I held her in my power, and through her I was sure of knowing what I wished to know. I sent for her, and tore from her the information I needed."

Cuchillo now listened, gloomy and silent, with his forehead concealed in his hands. There was a moment's silence. Finally he raised his head, and said:

"It was then that you wrote me this letter, appointing a rendezvous——"

"Which has reunited us—yes!"

"And you believe that I was implicated in this murder of Vigot, otherwise *Coco, the Death's-Head?*"

"Well!"

"Oh, Mariquita! What a villain you believed me to be?"

"But I have not reproached you—I do not blame you, nor judge you. He had, doubtless, surprised your secret. You only defended yourself."

"No, Mariquita. No! I am no assassin—at least, not a willing one. And now—less than ever." He shook all over. "I have twice imbrued my hands in blood. But, both of these times, fate made me a murderer—without my having premeditated such a crime, and in spite of myself. I am infamous enough without that since I have agreed to profit by bloodshed; and have accepted the reward of Louis Clermont's crimes."

He made a gesture of despair, and resumed:

"It is true, however, that *Coco* had discovered me, and possessed my secret. He had come to the *corral* near Buenos Ayres when Paul de Kandos was there, and had seen him. He had observed, without knowing his name or anything about him, the strange resemblance between us. When the inquest was held. he was one of those called upon to identify the body. Everyone had recognized it as mine. He alone doubted it, and suspected the substitution."

"And he said nothing about it?"

"He kept it carefully to himself. He saw in it a secret which might prove profitable to him. So he, also, began a search for Louis Clermont and for me, and, in the end, found us. My life and Clermont's were in his hands. With one word he could ruin us, and send us to the scaffold. 'Money, or I speak!' he said to us. 'I will bring it to you,' replied Clermont, 'and we will come to an understanding.' They agreed upon a day and hour to arrange the affair. As for me, I had determined to give him all he would ask, to assure him a sufficient income to purchase his silence. Clermont appeared to be of my opinion. But he nourished other projects."

"Child!" interrupted the *Portena*, "only the dead are silent!"

"That is what Clermont said when he returned after the crime had been committed; for he had gone to the meeting resolved to bring it to a violent end if Vigot appeared to be inclined to push his demands too far, or to betray us. They disputed for a long time, and Clermont drew his revolver in order to frighten the other, as he has assured me, for he had no intention of killing him there; and then, Coco, finding himself threatened, was the first to fire. He missed Clermont——"

"Who never misses! I know the rest," interrupted Mariquita. "All has turned out for the best. You are safe—positively safe, since the only one who would denounce you can no longer speak. Clermont will never betray you—and I will always love you!"

While speaking, she rose as if to throw herself into Cuchillo's arms. But, all at once, she stopped as if thunderstruck. She had just beheld a woman's portrait, hanging on the wall above the duke's writing desk, which she had not before remarked, owing to the excitement produced by her sudden meeting with Cuchillo.

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIED.

CUCHILLO, who was looking at her, saw the strange expression of her face, and, following the direction of her gaze, perceived the cause of it. He trembled from head to foot and became as white as a sheet. The portrait was Jeanne's.

The painter had admirably designed the ideal and charming type of the young wife. One saw the beautiful delicacy of her features and her white and rosy complexion. She was smiling, and her exquisite blue eyes, extraordinarily lifelike, seemed to look at Cuchillo and Mariquita, and say:

"Am I not present?"

"Who is this woman?" quickly demanded the creole.

Cuchillo remained mute, hesitating and distracted, seeking words which would not come.

"In fact!" resumed the *Marquesa*, fastening on her lover her black eyes, shining with a threatening light. "In fact, I had forgotten—— The joy and excitement of seeing you again—yes, it is true—they told me—they told me that Paul, the widower, had married again."

Cuchillo dared not look at her. The storm was approaching. He suffered horribly, not only from the danger which he felt hanging over his head, but from the fear of the grief he was about to cause this woman, so ardent, loving and devoted.

"But Paul de Kandos !—is you ! I never dreamt of this. It is you, then, who are married ?"

"Yes," finally answered Cuchillo, recovering his resolution, and comprehending that he could no longer postpone or delay this cruel explanation.

"You !" repeated Mariquita, shuddering, and approaching him abruptly, with flashing eyes.

"Mariquita, I believed you dead ! you know I did !"

"I believed you dead also—and have I taken another ? although I was still beautiful, and poverty threatened me ! I have returned to you—faithful to you as when you left me !"

"Maria, I beg you to be calm and reasonable !"

"Do you love her ?"

"It was the old duke who desired this marriage," replied Cuchillo, without answering her question.

"And you consented ?"

"I could not do otherwise. I passed for his son, his repentant and submissive son. I dared not awaken his suspicions—or those of the persons around him. He was sick, dying,—I had to obey—and I did ! Then, this marriage—oh ! it cost me much—I long hesitated—"

This was true, but for other reasons than Mariquita could suppose.

"But," he continued, "this also assured my future, positively settling my position and legally establishing my right to my assumed name."

Mariquita, while he was speaking, had become calm and appeased.

"Yes, you believed me dead, you passed for a widower," she repeated more slowly, "and I understand the necessities of the situation. You see, I am wise and reasonable. If you do not love her, it is all right. Here I am, alive. Return with me. I have not the right to be very severe. Provided that you love me, as I do you, exclusively ; provided you leave this woman—Eh ! well, I will be indulgent, and will forgive you."

She went up to the portrait, and gazed at it for a moment.

"She is very pretty, nevertheless!"

Receiving no answer, she turned towards Cuchillo.

"What are you going to do?" she asked him. "I love you. You are the only man I ever have, or ever will love. You are married—so much the worse—"

"Mariquita—what do you wish me to do?"

"What I did with my husband! I never would have consented to become his wife again, not even for a minute—"

"Maria—"

"Well, do likewise—with this woman. Let all be ended between you!"

"But that is impossible, she is—she is—my wife, do you—understand—"

"You can send her to her family, under some pretext. You see I am good natured. Or you can come and live with me."

While speaking, Mariquita watched him closely. But his face had changed its expression. It was no longer frank and sincere. It was as if covered with a mask, and his voice, calm and natural, had no longer any hesitation in it. He assumed this apparent calmness in order to borrow from it a little coolness and audacity.

"Mariquita," said he, tenderly taking her hands, "listen to me."

"I am listening."

"The situation is cruel and painful for us both! you know how much I loved you. You know what an ardent and sincere affection I will always have for you. When I believed you dead I avenged you—oh! atrociously. When my blood was flowing under the knife—of—you know whom!—I was happy to lose it, in thinking that it was for you."

"I do not doubt it, Cuchillo."

"If no one but myself was concerned, I would not hesitate—I would do what you desire with the greatest joy! But there is another—innocent of everything. I have no right to sacrifice the wife, whom, believing myself free, I have married, who has confidently given herself to me, and who has placed her future, honor

and happiness in my hands. Have I a right to kill her? for it would kill her!"

"And I?"

"And how shall I tell her—that you are alive? I would have to make my secret known to her—inform her how shameful, degraded and bloody my life has been; that I am an escaped galley-slave, the murderer of my brother, a forger, possessed of a name which is not my own, and a thief who has stolen a title and fortune! I would much prefer death, a thousand deaths, to such an existence!"

The *Portena* now listened with her eyes veiled by their long dark eyelids, her curved lashes throwing them into a yet deeper shadow.

"She loves you!" said she. "But she has a family, a position in society, a fortune; while I have nothing, nothing but you!"

"That is where you are deceived! She is an orphan and poor. She, also, has no one but me. And your daughter, whom you forget! What an example to give this child!"

"You adore her!" interrupted the *Portena.*

"Mariquita, I swear that you occupy, and always will, a place in my heart, of which no one can ever deprive you? Oh! I know, now, your real value! I did not before! Why did I not learn sooner that you were living, while there was yet time? You living, I swear it and you should believe me, I would have waited for you, for you alone, forever! Hold! will you remain my friend, my devoted friend! and have me for your strongest and most enthusiastic servant, defender and protector? Will you let me be your brother?—I will share my fortune with you. All that I can do for you, without toruring or killing the innocent, I will do. I will worship you as a beneficent fairy. But oh! Marquita, I beg of you pity—for her."

The creole was now walking with a regular step back and forth across the room, without saying a word or looking at him. She stopped again before the portrait, and attentively contemplated it. Cuchillo was silent, panting for breath, distracted and his eyes full

of tears. She slowly turned around, and said to him with a strange accent:

"You weep!—Poor friend! *Do I weep?* Yes, I know what love is—and I understand your grief. You offer me your friendship, and half of your fortune. You have a kind heart. I have always known it, and you are not ungrateful. But in this case, the absent are in the wrong!"

"Mariquita—"

"Let us go, Mono," she suddenly said, addressing the negro, who had heard all, as motionless and as impassive, in appearance, as a bronze statue. He advanced towards the door. She had, with an abrupt movement, closed the open *navaja*, and had replaced it in a pocket of the man's clothes she wore.

"Mariquita!" exclaimed Cuchillo, greatly moved, "do not leave me thus. When, how, shall we see each other again? I must see you in order to prove the sincerity and depth of my affection for you. Mariquita, do you hate me?"

"I? No! I see you are greatly to be pitied—and I am slightly fatigued with all this excitement."

"Where do you live? I must come and have a conversation with you. A fuller one than we have been able to have here to-night. I must explain things which you are ignorant of—"

"To play your part of brother—I understand. But, re-assure yourself—we shall see each other again! Only leave to me the choice of time and place."

"You promise me—"

"I swear that we shall meet again!"

"Give me your hand, Mariquita!"

She gave it to him, it was cold.

"We will meet soon, *amigo*."

She hastened out, followed by Mono.

Cuchillo would have liked to follow her in order to light the way, and say a last word to her, but his strength and courage abandoned him, and he fell back into his seat. And, besides, what more could he have said to her? The unexpected calmness of the *marquesa* had surprised him, and also re-assured him.

"She will forget!" he said to himself. "She will console herself. With her capricious and changeable nature, she will love some one else, not all at once, perhaps—but some day I will find some way of proving my affection for her. Good God! how unhappy I am, and what a life is mine!"

In the meantime Mono and Mariquita had gained the street.

"You suffer, mistress!" softly said the faithful servant.

"I have known Paradise for a moment," answered the creole, in a gloomy voice, through clenched teeth. "Now, I am in hell. I will not be there alone!"

"Do you wish this woman *to disappear?*" murmured Mono, his mouth close to Mariquita's ear.

"If I had desired her death, it would have already come to pass, and by my own hand. But her death would not stop his loving her," she added, in a lower tone, "and would not give her the pain which she causes me—and which devours me!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAITHFUL WAKEFULNESS OF BERNARD, THE STEWARD.

ON this night not one of the actors in our drama closed his, or her, eyes, Monsieur Bernard to begin with. He, nevertheless, had very strong nerves, and was not in the least sensitive. Moreover, like most men who live upon their fellow-beings, he possessed the happy faculty, under the most tragic circumstances, of sleeping soundly and quietly, which gave him plenty of rest, and permitted him to return to his labors with a clear head and a healthy body.

For this once, however, when he took himself to his comfortable bed, he could not get to sleep. He found himself in the presence of a new situation, against which his ordinary means of proceeding were powerless.

So long as it depended on him alone to unloose, by means of a knife or violent deed, the different Gordian knots by which his existence was surrounded, everything went smoothly. He had proved it in the cases of his former pupil, Paul de Kandos, old Sylvain, and the duke, and had again recently proved by Vigot, called *Coco, the Death's-Head*, who quietly reposed, henceforth mute and inoffensive, while Justice was discovering his assassin—which she had so far been unable to accomplish, having in her hands no thread to guide her.

"Now, it is very different!" said Clermont to himself. "Here I am face to face with two fellows, whom I cannot suppress, and who are becoming terribly dangerous! They are that imbecile, Cuchillo, and my own son. The former becomes honest, in a deplorable fashion, and takes it into his head to have remorse. The other is a scrupulous ninny. Gaston has not spoken yet; but, some day or other, he will speak to either the duke or Annette. This is certain, inevitable, He is too much in love to be depended upon. If he has not spoken so far, except to Cuchillo, it would not be so bad; but, once with his sweetheart, he would wish to excuse himself and justify his conduct, and, slap-bang! some of these fine mornings, the first time he finds himself in front of her, his secret—that is to say, mine—will escape him.

"Now, when he, on the one hand, sees that the duke, on learning who I am, still retains me in his service, instead of turning me over to the law, or when Mademoiselle de Kandos, on the other hand, learns the truth in regard to me, it will take neither of them long to guess the rest, and then!—there will be two persons too many in the secret.

"Certainly, my son will not denounce me! Not for my sake, but for his own and his mother's.

"As to Annette, that is another thing. I mistrust the young lady, who is sly, violent and vindictive. From the day on which she knows that we have killed her father, that the duke is nothing but an imitation father, I would not give four cents for my skin or Cuchillo's.

Now, Cuchillo is the fowl that lays the golden eggs! He is sacred to me! Well! that makes one. My son—we will pass over—that is two! Annette—I cannot do anything *there.* Cuchillo, himself, would be the first to punish me for that, and that makes *three!*

"Now, the danger is terrible, since I am disarmed. What am I to do? There is only one way out of it; that is to bring about the marriage of Gaston and Annette. Once they are married, I can sleep peacefully. In the first place, Gaston would hold his tongue. And then Annette, if she is my son's wife, and, consequently, my daughter-in-law, will remain silent, whether or not she learns the truth later on, so as not to dishonor her husband—or herself! Both would, morally, become our accomplices. Besides, they will go and live at a distance. They will leave this house, and the less one sees of them the better.

"But how to bring about this marriage? Annette, so long as she is ignorant, asks nothing better. Good! Cuchillo will object, for form's sake: but I know him; he is scrupulous, but he always gives in when in the presence of accomplished facts. In short, I hold *him!* There remains Gaston Lapierre!" Clermont sneered.

"This animal is full of pride, honorable ideas and violence. To think that *I* could have been his father! But there he is! You can do nothing *there,* my good fellow, so drop it!"

He reflected a moment; then he shook his head.

"He cannot play that game with papa," he ironically continued. "I am an old fox, and I don't believe in all this nonsense. One may be virtuous, but one has passions. He is in love, and poor. If I place before him the chance of being happy and rich—he will stuff his virtue in his pocket, with his handkerchief on top of it.

"What prevents this marriage? I? Why? Because I am alive! So long as he believed me lost, dead, at the devil, he courted the girl like mad! The only thing to do, then, is to die. I ask nothing better. It will still be necessary for him to acknowledge his father's name. Pshaw! there is more than one don-

key who is called Martin, and the name of Clermont is not such an uncommon one!" He scratched his head, and suddenly said:

"Let us look into this!"

Then, arising, he relit his candle, put on a superb, warm dressing-gown, approached a very solid and imposing-looking desk, which was near his bed, and opened it.

Without glancing at the many valuables it contained, he took some papers from a drawer, threw them on a table, and, seating himself before it, he studied them for a long time.

These papers were a copy of the proceedings at the inquest over the body of the real Paul de Kandos, and the death certificate of Jean Pruneau, called *Cuchillo.*

The papers, perfectly regular, bore the different signatures of the Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs of the Argentine Republic.

"Here is what I want!" murmured the convict. "I only need to change the names and a few other words, to put Louis Clermont wherever Jean Pruneau is written, etcetera, etcetera, and I will be regularly dead. Nothing is easier. I know how. In twenty-four hours I will have the signatures at my fingers' end, and Louis Clermont will be dead!" He rubbed his hands, as if pleased. "There never will have been better gotten up papers, nor false ones more truthful-looking." He arose and took two or three turns about the apartment.

"The proofs of Cuchillo's death we can replace if needed; but no one will disturb himself on his account. What an advantage in having no family! On the other hand, I might as well have official proofs of my decease. It assures my own safety a hundred-fold.

"Monsieur Gaston Clermont publishes his banns; Madame Clermont gives her consent, produces her son's birth certificate, her own marriage certificate, and my death certificate—and all is done. It goes like a letter through the mails."

Thereupon, Louis Clermont, satisfied with himself,

replaced the papers in his desk, reclosed it, took off his dressing-gown, got into bed, blew out his light, and went peacefully to sleep.

It was day-break.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MATRIMONIAL AGENT.

WE left Gaston Lapierre at the moment when, having refused Annette's hand, the unhappy young man quitted the hotel, in a state of mind too easily understood for us to need to describe it.

"All is over!" he said to himself. "Annette is forever lost to me! I have wounded her father. He desired a full and categorical explanation. It would be horrible to have to tell him the truth."

Let him who has loved sincerely, with all the ardor of youth, and with a temperament as affectionate as generous, put himself in Gaston's place, and he will comprehend and experience all that Louis Clermont's son suffered.

During part of the day he wandered about in the vicinity of Neuilly, not being able to determine to leave the neighborhood in which the young girl lived; not daring to return home, for fear of being alone; seeking in physical fatigue a relief for his sufferings; and turning over and over in his thoughts a thousand chimerical projects.

Finally he turned his steps homeward. He had left his mother suffering; she must have awaited his return with agony. The trouble he had caused Mademoiselle de Kandos and himself was more than enough, without adding to it fresh griefs for this poor woman, so devoted to him and already enduring so much.

Madame Lapierre was, in fact, greatly disturbed at his prolonged absence. When she saw him return, pale and haggard, she divined where he had been and what he had done.

"You have spoken with the duke?" she said, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, mother. But not as you think. Of his own accord, he offered me his daughter's hand. I only had strength enough to say: 'It is impossible!' The horrible secret did not escape my lips. I did not even think of it. I suffered too much. He had driven me away, indignant at my ingratitude, believing I know not what. Oh! what a coward I am! When I first loved Annette, should I not have fled?

"Ah! this man ——, who is my father! Ah! why can I not die, since death alone breaks family ties! But you are here, my poor mother. I owe you my life. I will live!"

The following night, the same one on which Mariquita visited Cuchillo, and Louis Clermont soliloquized, Gaston, also, did not close his eyes. The next morning, unable to work or to remain in one place, he started out early, not knowing where he was going. After two hours of hap-hazard walking, he found himself near the de Kandos mansion, gazing fondly at it from the concealment afforded by the shadows of a neighboring house, and weeping, like another Adam, before the gates of the lost Paradise.

"She is there!" he said to himself. "These walls alone separate us! She, also, is unhappy. Oh! is it to your love, so noble and disinterested, my Annette, that I owe these griefs?"

Gaston had scarcely left home, when some one rang at Madame Lapierre's door. She opened it herself, but recoiled in terror on beholding her husband? On recognizing him she uttered a suppressed cry, and instinctively started to close the door; but Louis Clermont roughly pushed forward, saying between his teeth:

"None of your tricks, Ernestine; you know that I do not like them. I wish to speak with you; do you hear: I WISH IT!"

These three words were pronounced threateningly.

It was broad daylight; people were going and coming on the stairs. Madame Lapierre understood that

all resistance, all explanations would be useless or dangerous. She therefore gave way, and her husband entering, closed the door behind him.

"You should never cross this threshold!" she murmured in a low voice, her eyes flashing and lighting up the whole of her haggard features.

"I come when I have business with you," he replied in an equally low but very resolute tone. "I am here on your son's account."

"Gaston has gone out—happily!" murmured the poor woman.

"I know it. I watched him depart."

"My working-women are here, nevertheless!"

"Yes, in the large room. But you have your own room, where we will be alone. And their presence will keep you quiet and render you reasonable. Let us go!"

Seeing that she remained motionless where she was, hesitating, through fear of scandal, indignation, and terror, he brutally pushed her aside, and, passing before her, entered the large room which served as the shop, with that wonderful memory of places he possessed, and which had often been of the greatest use to him. His wife followed him.

"Will you please enter my room, monsieur?" said she, in almost her natural voice, when she was in the presence of her working-women, who gazed at the new-comer. "We can converse more at our ease."

By an almost superhuman effort of will, the mother had recovered a portion of her coolness, and passing, in her turn, before her husband, she opened the door of her bed-chamber, and showed Monsieur Bernard into it.

"Now," she said to him, "we are alone! What do you wish with me? Speak, but be quick; for if Gaston should return and find you here—something unfortunate might happen. I repeat, monsieur, do not drive us too far. *If you wish* to see me, *I do not wish* to see you. You have done us enough evil. I will know how to protect my son, you may rest assured."

"Ta, ta, ta!" tranquilly said Clermont. "No useless

nonsense! I come on business that is very important, and very profitable—to the young man."

"You can, and you ought to do but one thing for him; but that I demand and will obtain at any price: disappear from his life—and never mix yourself up in it again!"

"I will, to make him happy!" sneered Clermont. "Listen! He loves and is loved by Mademoiselle de Kandos. Yesterday, like a fool, in spite of my advice, he refused her hand, and came within an ace of denouncing me to the duke."

"It was his duty!"

"It would injure no one but himself! you may believe me. And it is only because I wish him to avoid an irreparable piece of foolishness, whose consequences would be terrible, that I am here."

Clermont's accent made the poor woman shudder.

"He must, you understand, *he must* marry this girl. It is for my interest, as well as his own. And it shall be done!"

"You know that, thanks to you, it is impossible. One does not marry the son of a convict and murderer."

"When he is alive, yes, and one is obliged to say who is one's father! But when he is dead, and one has no acknowledgment to make—"

"Dead!" repeated Madame Lapierre, stupefied.

"Don't interrupt me! It is my presence and existence which prevents the marriage. Well, I am going to disappear, I am going to die," sneered the convict. If you will but hold your tongue, or rather get my son to hold his, before three days you shall have a perfectly regular 'death certificate of the man named Louis Clermont, who died at Buenos Ayres three years since.'"

"I do not comprehend."

"These papers," pursued the steward, "although giving my true name, will not, naturally, mention my different occupations, and I assure you that the duke will be content with them, as were the municipal authorities, without making any further inquiries."

"Then, this is a fresh forgery you propose, and you wish us to become your accomplices."

"I wish what I please. That is my business. I count on you to make the young fellow accept this transaction."

"Never, never will he accept!"

"It depends on you—Reflect! If Gaston refuses, it is utter despair for him, for you and for Annette. It is a constant threat suspended over my head, and I don't like such things," he added, in a tone which made the unhappy woman's flesh creep. "If he accepts, it is happiness and riches—that is a fortune for Gaston—the duke is not so rich as people suppose; but as little as it really is, it is still a great deal better than your present beggarly condition. To me it will be absolute security. The police will no longer search for the dead, buried three years ago in America."

Madame Lapierre was distracted, and evidently hesitated. Her mother's heart was willing to accept the proposal, which would console her son, render him happy, and give him the woman he loved. But many things were also repugnant to her, and frightened her in this proposition—this, from every standpoint, shameful proceeding, which had been sprung on her in such a sudden and unexpected fashion.

"Gaston will refuse," said she; "and he will do right, for it is infamous."

"Does Gaston love Mademoiselle de Kandos?"

"Yes."

"Do you consider him an honest man, and worthy of her?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Is she worthy of him?"

"Certainly."

"Eh, well! what is there that is infamous in uniting the two good young people?"

"But——"

"Will he make her happy?"

"I am certain of it!"

"Do you prefer his despair?"

"Oh, no!——. My poor child!"

"Then, why do you wish to punish him for his father's little irregularities?"

"Him ?"

"Certainly ! if he does not marry Annette."

"Oh ! my God ! my God ! What a situation to be placed in. It is frightful !"

"It is simple as a—b—c. He does not relate my history, which no one will ask of him. He furnishes my death certificate. He marries, and goes away with his wife to wherever he pleases—you follow your children. One hears nothing more said of the late Louis Clermont. And I make three people happy—to say nothing of myself."

"Then you will disappear—you will leave the duke, and France ?"

"*Carajo !* how fast you go ! Why not ask me to blow out my brains at the same time ?"

"If you were not the worst of scoundrels you would have done so long since !"

"Thanks ! But I am to give all, then, and receive nothing. I will do as I please, and remain near the duke, who loves me, and whom I adore."

"That's impossible. Gaston would not consent to it."

"Indeed ! And why ? Does this concern him ? What are you afraid of ? That I will run away with, or swallow this excellent gentleman ? Ah ! what do you take me for ? Doubtless, for a fool ! Undeceive yourself. A scamp, if you please ; but an idiot, never ! To rob or kill the duke would be to give my head to the scaffold ! Would not the first suspicion rest upon Bernard, the steward ? Now, Bernard is like Cæsar's wife. He should not be suspected ! He would be lost—and he cares something for his skin and his own poor little welfare. I have covered up all traces of Louis Clermont. I will now bury him, in partnership with you. These things shall not be done by halves. No, no, Bernard will remain the friend of the duke, and the model of stewards. It is to my interest, do you see ; and I care as much for

the duke's life and fortune, as if I was the duke himself."

The ex-gaucho spoke with such an accent of truth that Madame Lapierre could no longer doubt his sincerity.

Still, she remained silent, struggling between the horror this infamous proposition caused her, and the secret but violent desire to assure her son's happiness.

"Now," resumed the tempter, "remember this well, Ernestine, the wild boar, when cornered, turns on the dogs!"

Madame Lapierre recoiled in fright before the atrocious look of the convict.

"Monster!" she murmured.

"So! it is understood, and agreed upon! You will speak to Gaston——"

"Yes, but——if he refuses?"

"He will accept, if you wish it! And you *will* wish it, *because I do.*"

The unhappy mother clasped her hands, feeling that it was her duty to refuse, but trembling before the consequences of her refusal; and for her son, whom she felt was threatened.

"Is it settled?"

"It is horrible!"

"To make him happy? To save him by assuring my safety?"

"At such a price——"

"In three days you will receive the papers of which I told you, proving my death. In four days—the young man will return to demand the hand of Mademoiselle de Kandos, which will be accorded him. Otherwise, *I will act!* And *then*, beware!"

"She will yield," said Monsieur Bernard to himself, on leaving Madame Lapierre. "She is afraid of me, and what I may do if she resists. And, then, she desires as much as I do to see him marry the young lady. As for Monsieur Gaston, that virtuous young gentleman will be only too happy to take the girl and

her fortune. Ah! ah! *my son* the son-in-law of the Duke of Kandos! What a comedy life is!"

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER STORY.

MADAME LAPIERRE, almost mad with grief and devoured by anguish, had to return to her workwomen as if nothing was wrong.

For her, this pretended coolness and indifference was intolerable torture.

As improper as was Clermont's proposition; as contrary as it was to the laws of honor; although it required, on the son and mother's part, a real, effective complicity, it had its tempting sides. This one, above all—it assured Gaston's happiness for the rest of his life. Oh! if she could only have accepted without her son's knowledge, leaving him the integrity of his loyalty, she would not have hesitated. But Gaston knew that his father lived. He could not profit by the lie and the forgery without participating in it directly and voluntarily, without falling almost to the level of the wretch, his father.

Still, if she refused, and did not obtain the young man's consent, what might befall him? This man, who had threatened him, was capable of anything; she did not deceive herself in that respect. She must, then, save Gaston! But, how? Leave Paris? Fly to a distance? They were poor, and had neither the means nor ability to adopt a resolution so easy and convenient to the rich. Besides, could they be sure of earning their bread? Then flight would not cure Gaston of his love. He would carry with him, everywhere, the image of Mademoiselle de Kandos—his wound would bleed anywhere else as it did at Paris. Now that she had had a glimpse of what might be possible, she could not bring herself to give it up. It was true that Gaston was worthy of Annette, and

that he would render her happy. Married to Mademoiselle de Kandos—what a dream!

While Madame Lapierre gave herself up to these thoughts and underwent the temptation of these different impulses, she unconsciously decided to influence her son in the way Louis Clermont had indicated; for there are circumstances in which to hesitate, to struggle, to reason, to discuss the pros and cons, is to already surrender. Gaston was still at Neuilly, not daring to knock at the duke's door in order to see Annette for the last time, and unable to decide upon fleeing from her altogether, and thus placing between them, in actual space, the distance which would henceforth morally separate them.

But his feet could not leave the ground which the young girl's little feet touched whenever she went out.

At length he perceived that the neighbors and the few passers by noticed his prolonged presence and his agitation. Evidently they were astonished at it, in spite of the precautions he had taken to escape attention.

"I will compromise her!" he said to himself. "Well, I must be off! Adieu, Annette! Adieu!" And making a determined effort, he started away. But he had scarcely gone ten steps before he felt a light touch on his shoulder, and heard a soft, low voice murmur in his ear:

"Give me your arm, Monsieur Lapierre!"

He turned around, and found himself face to face with Jeanne.

"Madame la duchesse!" he stammered.

"Don't look so astounded," she said, "and let us walk on: I want to talk to you."

He mechanically obeyed. A sort of unreasoning joy had taken possession of him. This well known face of one who lived near Annette, whom he believed he would never see again, produced upon him the effect of a ray of sunlight which lights the darkness. It was as if something of the woman he loved had come to him, He silently regarded her, scarcely dar-

ing to breathe, lest he should drive away the vision; asking himself if he dreamed, and fearful of the awakening.

"Monsieur Lapierre," said the little duchess, "I saw you from the garden. I was thinking of going to see you at your home, but you were here, so I profited by it. Let us converse."

"How is—Mademoiselle de Kandos?" he asked. "Has she seen me? Does she know you are here?"

"Annette has not seen you. She is shut up in her own room. She is ignorant that I am with you, and she must remain ignorant of it."

"Ah!" replied Gaston, with a suppressed sob, "she hates me now, and she ought to hate me—I deserve it—my conduct towards her has been cowardly, infamous—"

"No, Monsieur Lapierre, she does not hate you, but she suffers terribly, and your conduct is inexplicable."

"She suffers! Yes, she must suffer, and through my fault. But she does not suffer any more than I do. Oh! if it had not been for my mother, I would have already killed myself."

"I do not think that would have consoled Annette very much."

While talking, they had gained Neuilly avenue, along which they walked slowly towards the bridge, as they were now out of sight of the duke's mansion.

"Monsieur Lapierre," resumed the duchess, in a voice at once firm and sympathetic, "you know that I esteem you highly—and even have an affection for you; my present proceeding is the best proof of it. On the other hand, I love Annette, and wish to see her happy. You have refused her hand. For this there must have been very serious and very grave reasons."

"Oh! yes," murmured the young man, shuddering.

"Very good. But that is not enough. You owe her an explanation. You owe it for several reasons In the first place, because you cannot leave an honest young girl in the position of having been refused

without her knowing why. Secondly, because you are young, and may perhaps exaggerate certain difficulties, which others, if they knew them, could doubtless help you to overcome."

"You are right," responded Gaston, "and I feel how odious and incomprehensible my conduct has been. I wished to tell all to the duke, but my courage failed me; yes, it was cowardice on my part. It was because I felt that if I once spoke all would be ended —ended forever!"

"Well," kindly said the duchess, "let us admit that this might be true. It is none the less your duty to explain yourself. Your silence is misery to Annette, and anything would be better to her than to believe that you do not love her as well as she loves you."

"Madame, to you, to you I will tell all! But you will be horrified afterwards, you will understand. Listen—"

"No, no, tell me nothing!" she hastily interrupted.

He looked at her with astonishment.

"Why? It would be less painful for me to tell you. You are so good, kind, and humane. You are so sympathetic. You have upon me the effect of an angel of light and purity."

"No, no," said she, energetically. "You should tell all to Annette; to her only. It is she whom you must reassure. It is she to whom you owe it. It is she who is unhappy and loves you. And, besides, if she knew that you had told another, even her father, what you had concealed from her, she would never forgive you for it. She must not even know that I have seen you. You must seem to be acting on your own impulse.

"But she loves you as you deserve to be loved!

"You are young, Monsieur Lapierre, and do not understand women!"

He made a gesture of surprise.

"I have a profound and devoted affection for Annette," pursued the duchess. "She also loves me very much. But in the friendship of two women there are always a thousand restrictions and susceptibilities.

She would never pardon you for having greater confidence in me than in her, nor for following my advice. If I was in her place, I would feel the same. I can understand that it costs you less to speak to me than to her whom you love. But if I loved you I could no longer understand it."

"You are, perhaps, right," said Gaston, in a mournful voice. "Well, I will tell her all! But it is frightful; and, far from consoling her and being a relief to me, this avowal will increase her grief—and I—Oh! I would sooner die than to make it, above all to her!"

"It is a duty, Monsieur Lapierre. Annette has a right to know why, after you were allowed to love her, you declined her hand when it was offered to you."

"I am ready to speak!" said Gaston, in a resolute voice. "Yes, here is a duty to be performed. She must not doubt my love. This avowal will be my expiation. May you be blessed for having decided me to make it."

He had become as pale as death.

"Thanks!" said the little duchess, kindly pressing his hand. "I must leave you and return to Annette. Present yourself in a quarter of an hour; ask for the duchess and you will be received. You promise me?"

"Yes, madame."

"And she shall never know that it was I who influenced you to do this?"

"Never, I swear!"

"I believe you, monsieur. Be courageous, and understand well that it is for Annette alone to pronounce judgment on your conduct and its motives."

Gaston seized her hand and carried it to his lips with a sort of religious adoration.

"You are a saint!" he murmured.

"No," said she, smiling kindly. "I love Annette and esteem you, that is all!"

And she hastened away, lightly and rapidly, in the direction of the family residence.

CHAPTER X.

DISCLOSURE.

A QUARTER of an hour later, Gaston, faithful to his promise, rang resolutely at the front door of the Kandos mansion.

The servant who answered the bell and who knew him very well, as Gaston had for a year past been a *habitué* of the house in his capacity as music teacher to Mademoiselle de Kandos, opened the door and showed him up to the duchess's own private apartments on the first floor.

He had doubtless received his orders, for, without announcing the young man or even knocking, he opened a door, and Gaston found himself in a salon which he had never entered before.

It was small and charming, like the woman who inhabited it: a sort of boudoir, drawing-room and working-room, in which the duchess received no one but Annette and her husband, and which seemed to form a part of herself.

When Gaston suddenly found himself in this room, he saw that two ladies were there. One, Annette, was seated; the other, the duchess, was standing up. The latter, who was expecting him, perceived him at once, and thanked and encouraged him with a rapid glance. Then, stooping over the young girl, who sat with bowed head and half-closed eyes, she whispered to her:

"Here is Monsieur Lapierre!"

He had stopped near the door; paler, and trembling more, than a criminal on his way to the gallows.

Annette suddenly raised her head and gazed upon

him, stifling a cry of surprise, which died almost unheard on her half-opened lips. In making this movement she had turned her pretty face towards him. It was very pale, and had such an expression of deep grief and silent and unconscious reproach, that it made Gaston forget everything else.

He hastened towards her, fell at her feet and, seizing the hands she held out to him, covered them with hot tears.

"You!" was all she said.

Gaston had expected a very different reception; knowing the superior nature of the young girl, and how passionate she was, yet also how susceptible to any imaginary slight, which often rendered her hard and sometimes unjust, he was all the more touched and profoundly moved at this one simple word, which was less a reproach than a caress, and at the kindness with which she gave him her little white hands, so soft and trembling.

Gaston expected to see her wounded, proud and haughty. He found her tender, humble, without anger, and almost resigned, accepting his unexpected presence as a great joy, tempered with grief.

"Oh, Annette!" he finally said, raising his eyes, and almost intoxicated at finding her beautiful ones gazing into his, "forgive me all the evil I have done you. If you but knew how I love you."

"You love me?" she repeated. "Yes; I see it; I feel it; and that is everything!"

While they were gazing at and speaking to each other, their hands clasped as if nothing could ever separate them again, they had completely forgotten the duchess, and she had completely retired without their perceiving it.

"How you have suffered!" said Gaston, contemplating her. "You have wept, and for me! Oh! if I could only bear your part of the suffering, as well as my own share, I would be happy, even though it killed me!"

"No," said she, kindly. "I assure you that it is good to suffer for those whom one loves. And if you

could take my part of the grief, that is, if I ceased to suffer it would be because I had ceased to love you; and you would not wish that?"

"No," replied the young man, with the artless egotism of a lover.

"It was good of you to come back, to return in spite of all. When I saw you go away yesterday, after your interview with my father, without speaking a word to me or even throwing a glance towards my window, I believed that all was ended, that I should never see you again, nor you me—even to weep together!"

"Annette, I was mad! The duke had dismissed me indignantly, and my conduct deserved it. Ah! you do not know!"

"I know nothing but this, that you refused my hand, which the duke offered you. And all my anger, all my rebelliousness, all my captiousness, all, all disappeared before this one idea: 'Lost! we are forever lost to each other!'"

"You are better than I, Annette. Your pride, for you have a great deal, and I love it, as part of yourself, is less strong than your love, and it was pride which kept me silent. I hate, despise myself. Forgive me. I have come to tell you all, do you understand me? *all!*"

"Ah!" said she, and her large eyes were filled with light.

"Yes, ought one to blush before her whom he loves? Does he not owe her a full and entire confidence? If you rebuke me afterwards, I will still bless you. What does it matter? You shall, at least, have proof that I am entirely yours, and that I keep nothing from you, not even that which I am going to tell you."

"Well, speak!" interrupted the young girl, leaning yet closer to him. "For one second, on seeing you again, it passed through my mind and heart with the rapidity of light, that as you had returned it was because the separation was not final. I was deceived. But speak—who knows, perhaps—together—we will find a remedy, if there is one."

"There is none, Annette. You, yourself, will pronounce and execute my sentence."

"Your *sentence! You* culpable! What next?"

"Yes, culpable—culpable for having loved you when I ought not."

"Is one also master of himself in such cases?"

"I should have been sufficiently master of myself to have fled from this house."

"Then you would not have loved me?"

"Ah! well, listen, Annette."

He passed his hand over his forehead to wipe away the cold sweat which covered it as the moment for the terrible confession arrived.

"Annette," he resumed, in an almost inaudible voice, "my name is not Lapierre!"

She looked at him with an astonishment, which, for the moment, overcame every other sentiment.

"Your name is not Lapierre?" she finally repeated.

"Lapierre is my mother's name."

"Well?"

"Her maiden name—and she is married!—and not a widow!"

"Well—why?—I don't understand—why do you not bear your father's name!"

"Because that name is infamous, dishonored!"

"Oh! what is that to me?" cried the young girl, in a transport of affection and ignorance, and completely forgetful of the world, its laws, and its prejudices, which are far worse than its laws; "*you* are honest, good and noble!"

"Annette, my name, my father's, is that of a convict—that of an assassin, of the worst of wretches!"

There was a silence. Annette had faintly shuddered. Gaston felt it. He concealed his face in his hands, overwhelmed, in the posture of a criminal, and murmured:

"Oh! you see it, Annette——"

He dared not look at her. It was a time of horrible anguish to him. If this silence had lasted much longer he would have died of anguish at her feet.

All at once two lips were pressed upon his forehead, and two hands seized his.

"My poor friend! My poor Gaston! My *dearly beloved!*" said Mademoiselle de Kandos, with an accent of passionate tenderness.

He raised his head.

"Well, and after all?" she resumed. "Yes, I can understand your hesitation and grief. It is frightful. I know——what you have experienced."

"*You!*"

She quickly broke off, but soon continued:

"But, we will leave that! You are not responsible for the crimes of your father—poor unfortunate!"

"I am not responsible, it is true; but there is a tie between us which I cannot cast aside, and I cannot offer you this cursed and bloody name. And even if I dared to, even if you were sublime enough to accept it, your father would never give his consent. No, it would be impossible."

"Nevertheless, you knew all this when we were first lovers!"

"And that was where I was infamous."

"No, but you should have told me then."

"I should, yes—but—the situation has recently changed."

"So you have already told me. But in what?"

"In this: my father escaped from the galleys, and disappeared, many years ago, without leaving any traces—so that I might well believe he was dead—or, at all events, that he was far away—and that he would never be heard from again."

"Well?"

"He has returned—I have seen him."

Annette turned pale.

"Where, when?"

"About two weeks ago, at home. And, oh! my God! under such terrible circumstances! He had been gone twenty years—I knew him no more than he did me." Gaston shuddered at the recollection of his meeting with his father."

"Tell me all, Gaston."

"He was fresh from the commission of a new murder. He was fleeing, with justice at his heels. He asked me to save him from the scaffold!—after having tried to kill me, not knowing who I was."

"Yes, this is horrible!" murmured the distracted young girl.

Again they were silent.

"Where is he now?" she finally asked.

"Oh! do not ask me, Annette—yet, still, you should know it. This is what I ought to have told the duke, for this criminal threatens you! But——"

"But what?"

"Annette, can I denounce him, deliver him up, and throw to the executioner—this man, whose son I am?"

"No!" she replied, in a hollow voice. "Oh! no, never!"

"Even if I fear that he may commit other crimes!"

"He must be prevented from doing so! Now, tell me all; his name, and where he is concealed. You and I are one. It is not betraying your secret; it is sharing the terrible burden."

Gaston felt one last and supreme moment of hesitation and dread; then he hastily leaned towards Annette, and whispered, as if he feared the sound of his own voice:

"His name is Louis Clermont, and he lives—*here!*"

"Here!" said she, her face agitated by sudden and great emotion.

"He is the duke's steward! he whom they call Monsieur Bernard."

Annette uttered a terrible cry, and stood up perfectly rigid.

"What ails you?" asked Gaston, frightened.

"What ails me!" she repeated, with a wild burst of laughter. "Ah! it was really true, then?"

And her laugh died away as she staggered and fell fainting into Gaston's arms.

CHAPTER XI.

ANNETTE'S SECRET.

"ANNETTE, what is the matter?" murmured Gaston, distracted. "You do not answer me! She is going to die—I have killed her——"

He clasped her to his heart—covering her pale face and closed eyes with ardent and despairing kisses.

"Oh! help—help!" he at length cried out, more and more frightened, and, seeking with his eyes for a bell-rope or some way of obtaining assistance without leaving her, he started to put her in an easy chair near by. But as soon as his arms were unclasped from around her, the young girl appeared to return to herself. Her long eye-lashes were raised.

"Stop!" she murmured, in a weak voice. "Hush—be silent."

At the same time she took his hand.

"But you suffer! you are ill!"

"There, that bottle!" sighed Annette.

And she glanced towards a small table, on which, among various toilet articles, was a small, gold-mounted, crystal smelling-bottle. Gaston seized it, and opening it, made Annette, whose breathing was short and quick, inhale the odor.

"Now, I am better," said she, as, with her lover's help, she arose to a sitting posture. "I alarmed you, friend. I am greatly ashamed of myself. Forgive me—I did not know I was so foolish."

"Oh! I can easily understand why you were alarmed, learning that this man was near you and your father; but reassure yourself. In reality, you run no serious risk, for he knows that I am watching over you, and he dares not risk exposure. Without

that, do you believe that any consideration would have made me withold or delay any avowal; or would have prevented me from speaking to the duke? No —no! Rather the scaffold for him; and shame and suicide for me!"

She smiled kindly, and said:

"I am braver than that. And, besides, to save you pain, what danger would I not risk!"

"How you love me!" murmured Gaston, enchanted in his grief, and experiencing, amidst so many cruel emotions, the holiest and profoundest of joys. "It is true, then," he continued, "that one can be loved so much! Now, Annette, I bless all that has separated us, and everything which has tortured us, as it has taught me to know you better, and to read the depths of your heart. Oh, how happy I am! Do I merit so much happiness? What are ambition, glory, fortune, and all the joys of this earth in comparison with the intoxicating pleasure of being thus at your feet, hearing your voice and kissing your hands? The light from your beautiful eyes penetrates me—it is the sun—the spring-time—it is love! The only feeling that can tear us from the earth, and make us greater than the world! Anyone knowing our situation would mourn with us. Yet we are the happiest beings in creation!"

"Yes," said Annette; "and still more happy than you might think, for this terrible avowal, which has cost you so much, which has separated us, unites us closer, through fate and anguish, than we were before united through our love."

"What is it that you are saying, Annette?" asked Gaston, surprised. "I do not understand you."

"Come, sit down here, Gaston, beside me. I have something to tell you in my turn. I have a confidence to repose in you—a secret to reveal. Like you, I forget all my self-respect—after having struggled, after having wished to remain silent, as you did. We shall no longer have any secrets from each other."

"Of what secret do you wish to speak? What secret can there be in such a calm life as yours."

"You have revealed it to me—or, rather, you have removed all my doubts. I doubted the evidence of my senses. I told myself that I was deceived, that I had not heard correctly, or that I misunderstood. I knew well that this was not true, but I struggled against my own convictions. You have cleared up everything. It was true—positively true!"

She gave a quick shudder.

"Explain yourself, Annette. You frighten me."

She lowered her voice, and leaned closer to him.

"We have nothing to reproach ourselves with—it is horrible, and this pleases me."

"Annette, what are you saying? I—I do not understand."

"You will soon."

She was very pale, and her eyes shone with feverish fire. For a moment she was silent, collecting herself, and finding, perhaps, that her avowal was more difficult to make than a few minutes before she had thought it would be.

"Listen," she finally resumed. "You must have often noticed my strange questions and behavior when you have said that you could not marry me?"

"That is true!" replied Gaston. "But I felt myself so blameworthy——"

"You must have thought it strange that I should have so frequently and persistently asked you if the obstacle was on your side, on on mine, whether it was you—or my father?"

"In fact—I now recall—yes—but I suffered too much to ever dream——"

"And you have also remarked, that although the duke appeared good and kind to me, and did for me what so few fathers would have done, in being the first to make himself an advance which you could not have made, and in being willing to give me to the man I loved, without taking into account the difference in our fortunes and positions, you must have remarked that I never expressed for him any of the sentiments of gratitude and affection which this conduct

would have inspired in any other young girl in my situation?"

"I attributed that to your peculiar nature—so difficult to understand—restrained to excess or adorably expansive in turns, and which is always astonishing one by its sudden changes," replied Gaston, greatly astonished.

"Gaston, I have never loved my father!" said she, in a still lower tone.

"Why is that?"

"For a thousand reasons. In the first place, he abandoned me, an infant, as he had my mother. I have been brought up away from him. I knew he had been cursed and driven away by my grandfather, who worshiped me, and whom I loved. I knew, without understanding why, that he had been a bad son, a bad husband; and my mother, you see, has been a kind of religion with me. I observed that he was a bad father, since for fifteen years he had been able to live far away from his daughter without endeavoring to see her."

"But you, yourself, acknowledge that he has been kind to you since his return; and I must say that he greatly moved me by his reception of, and his sympathy with, me—it was so great and generous."

"One is not master of one's self in such things as these, Gaston. I have struggled, believe me, against this feeling which appeared to me wicked and unnatural. When I saw him, two years ago, for the first time, although he appeared moved, and wept on embracing me, I felt a sensation of repulsion. There is everything about him to please one, I acknowledge. He has been good—very good to me, although at times he seems as if embarrassed and intimidated——"

"Intimidated?"

"Yes; and now, I understand why!"

"And why is it, then?"

"Listen! Jeanne, whom I love very much—the only being I do love besides yourself, loved him, and I was the first to perceive it. She is so charming, so devoted, so admirably good——"

"Oh! yes!" murmured Gaston.

"That I became ashamed of my indifference, of my antipathy. 'Since she loves him, he must merit it,' I said to myself. And when she married him I almost believed that I would end by having for him the feelings of a daughter for her father—"

"Well?"

"Well," resumed Annette, with an approach to a sneer, which alarmed Gaston, "I was the one who was right, after all." She raised herself up. "Gaston—*my father is as bad as yours!*"

"That is impossible! Heavens! what are you saying?"

"It is impossible!—Yes, that was what I said to myself, every day, at first; but, after what you have told me there is no longer any doubt. I heard correctly."

She shivered. Her hands were like ice. Her long eyelashes drooped over her flashing eyes.

"What have you heard?" asked Gaston, as anxious now on her account as he had been a short time before on his own.

"It was shortly after our arrival at Paris. We had just taken possession of this house," she continued in a short and abrupt tone. "One evening it was very warm. I was nervous and could not sleep. I had known you for a short while, and had commenced to love you. Being unable to close my eyes, I arose, put on a light dressing-gown and started to go down into the garden. The nightingale sang; it seemed as if he called me and as if he spoke of you. I softly descended the main stairway so as to disturb no one. It was late, everyone had gone to bed, and I believed all were asleep.

"In creeping along the corridor I saw a gleam of light under the door of the duke's study. This surprised me. I thought he was in the duchess's apartment. I feared that he might come out and see me and would not consent to my going into the garden alone at that time of night. While I stood hesitating what to do, ready at the slightest alarm to go back to

my room, I heard the sound of voices. He was not alone. He spoke violently—and some one, a man, answered him in the same tone! It was Bernard—"

"My father!"

"Yes, your father! I did not wish to listen, as you can well imagine, but a strange word riveted me to the spot—"

"What word was it?"

"The word, 'galleys.'"

"Oh!" said Gaston, distracted.

"Then I all at once noticed the familiar tone in which this Bernard spoke to my father."

"They are familiar?"

"Yes, when they are alone—while before the world he is very respectful, indeed, to 'Monsieur le duc!'"

"This is strange!"

"You shall see. I don't know exactly what I felt, but it was a sort of vertigo, a frightful presentiment. I drew nearer the door and—listened!"

"And—"

"And I heard, indistinctly, broken phrases. The duke, in a voice which frightened me and which I had never before known him to use, said: 'Depart, wretch! I do not know what restrains me from crushing you under my heel!' 'Try it once!' responded the other, in a railing yet threatening tone. 'I will only have to say one word to send you to the galleys or the scaffold!'"

"Oh! my God!" murmured Gaston.

"'I will not go alone!' replied the duke. 'Possibly!' retorted Bernard. 'But you will go as surely as I.'"

"This is frightful! Are you sure you heard and understood correctly, Annette?"

"There was a humming in my ears. I believed I was going to die!" pursued the young girl, almost becoming ill at the remembrance of the scene. Suddenly a piece of furniture was moved—I heard a step approach the door, I recovered my senses, and fled from the place. I, instinctively, regained my chamber, and fell unconscious on the floor, where I found myself at daybreak."

CHAPTER XII.

BOTH IN THE SAME PREDICAMENT.

FOR a moment there was an oppressive silence. One could even hear their long drawn breaths. Gaston was the first to speak.

"Are you very sure that you did not dream all this?" he said finally, but hopelessly; "that it was not a frightful nightmare? You know that such things are. A dream is often so distinct and clear that one takes it for reality—and can scarcely drive out of their minds the images evoked by an uneasy sleep."

"No, Gaston; I have, without believing it, said the same to myself. I have tried to cling to that hope, also. But there was no illusion about it. Remember, that on recovering my senses, I was partly dressed—I had on my dressing-gown. Moreover, my door, which I had pulled to after me, remained half open. Then, I had really gone out. Still, for a long time, I endeavored to believe it was an hallucination, but without success. Now there is no longer any doubt. That is—Bernard being the man you say—you can plainly see that the words overheard by me correspond too exactly with the truth for us to attempt to deceive ourselves any longer. It would be a cowardly shrinking from fate. Let us look the truth in the face, and cease playing—as far as we are concerned, a useless deception."

"Thus the duke—oh! Annette—my poor Annette!"

He hurriedly caught her to his breast. She now seemed nearer to him. A common misfortune henceforth united them. It was no longer a case of a great lord's noble and rich daughter loving and being loved by a poor musician. It was a young girl and a young

man, equally stricken by misfortune, equally bowed down under the threat of the same danger and the same shame. He now understood Annette's first words when, before revealing her secret to him, she exclaimed :

"That which separated us brings us together again, through fate and suffering, as we were before united by our love !"

"Still," he resumed, "there are things which I cannot explain to myself, which escape me. I do not see all this clearly. How has the duke—your father—a man in his position—been forced to commit crimes which put him at the mercy of Louis Clermont? How is it that this has never been heard of? Why has he never been pursued? How can he live tranquilly, openly, here in Paris—without anything being suspected ?"

"You forget that he has lived many years in America, on the *pampas*, as a *gaucho*! I have heard it said that the life is a savage one, and justice is powerless, or badly executed. It may have been at that period, without anyone knowing anything about it. Besides, no one suspects the past of Bernard, his steward !"

"He conceals himself under a false name ?" Gaston suddenly paused, but as quickly resumed : "And you say that this man and your father are very familiar ?"

"Yes, I am sure of it."

"Then," continued Gaston, trembling, "they cannot have secrets from each other."

"Well ?"

"Well ! then the duke must know who I am. It is impossible that my father has not told him, now that he has discovered me—that my name is Clermont, and what ties unite us."

"Indeed!" said the young girl.

Gaston struck his forehead.

"Listen, this is certain, now I recollect——"

"What!"

"When I came, two days ago, to refuse your hand, my poor darling, I encountered Bernard as he was coming from the duke's study !"

"Ah!"

"And he said to me: 'Don't speak to the duke. Keep my secret. If you are wise Annette is yours!'"

"He said that to you! He knows that we love each other? He knew that you came——on my account?"

"Yes, yes——"

"You can see plainly," interrupted Annette, "that the duke knew all, when he offered you my hand!"

They looked at each other in profound silence.

"Well," resumed Annette, in a low and affectionate voice, "I am only a young girl. What I am about to say is perhaps improper, but I will be frank and sincere. I know only my love. The laws, prejudices and scruples of the world, what are they to me? Provided it does not know what it need not know, what matters the rest to us? Are we responsible for the misfortunes of our birth? No, I know that I am honest. I am sure that you are the best and noblest of men. I love you, and will never love any but you, and if I cannot be yours I will die mad and desperate. Once married, we will fly from this house and go far away, together, and live only for and in each other; you are poor, so am I. I do not wish a dowry, nor anything else from the duke's fortune. You will labor, and I will also; I I will become a working-woman with your mother, who will know how to employ me, and we will be happy. Write to the duke, or, better still, go to him and say that you accept. You cannot be ashamed, now, to give me your name, since mine is worth no more than yours."

Gaston heard her with delight. He now only saw one thing, which was, that Annette, knowing his secret and agreeing to become his wife, the duke knowing who he was and yet giving him his daughter, and being, doubtless, an accomplice in crime of his own father, he no longer had any reason for declining a happiness which had been brought about by the strange combination of two overwhelming misfortunes.

"And then," he exclaimed, "if that which you believe is true, I ought not to leave you here in such hands. Yes, yes, you are right, my well-beloved; what

you have told me of your father is no longer to be doubted. Now I recall the duke's emotion, the strange words which escaped him and the savage and threatening expression of terror which convulsed his features when I told him that I could not give you my name. He believed that it was because of him."

"Now, you see I was right, Gaston! Oh! I will be your wife. I am anxious to leave this dreadful atmosphere. Take me, carry me away, and let us forget it all."

"But I will have to produce certificates of my birth and my mother's marriage, and my father being alive, that would denounce him."

"If such was the case he would not have said to you: 'If you are wise Annette is yours.'"

"You are right; together they have invented some method that I am ignorant of."

"It must be so. Do not be uneasy; simply say to the duke: 'I accept!' If he had not known how to arrange the marriage without any danger he would not have proposed it."

"My head swims!" murmured Gaston. "It seems as if I was walking in darkness and had the vertigo."

"Only love me as well as I love you, Gaston. I do not stop to reflect, or to hesitate. I am ready to bless the crimes and shame which give me to you!"

"I will prove that I am worthy of your love. Yes, now it is impossible that you should not be my wife, since it is possible that you may be. How, I am ignorant, as yet. But you are right, I will go and write to the duke that I accept."

"Above all, let him suspect nothing!"

"Do not be afraid. Your secret shall die with me!"

"And yours with me! Gaston, embrace your wife!"

Their lips met. It was for the first time! A slight noise made them start from each other's arms. It was the duchess, who thus announced her return. They had been left together for two hours, and Jeanne now came to warn them that it was near the dinner hour and time for them to separate.

Gaston, on seeing her enter, suddenly seized his hat,

"Madame la duchesse, thanks!" he said to her, and hastened out of the room, and then out of the house, running like mad, absolutely intoxicated and out of his senses from joy.

"Eh, well? my dear Annette," said the little duchess, watching the young girl's radiant face.

"Oh! Jeanne," murmured the other, "I am happy, very happy!"

"Then you have had an explanation, and the obstacles which appeared insurmountable do not exist?"

"No, no!" said Annette, "but do not question me——" She stopped abruptly and fixed, with a frightened air, her eyes on the laughing ones of the little duchess. "Ah! my God! And you!" she murmured, with an expression of anguish on her lovely features. "I had forgotten——"

"What are you saying?"

"Nothing, nothing!"

She hid her face on Jeanne's shoulder, and clasped her in her arms, while a flood of tears filled her eyes. She had suddenly remembered that Jeanne was her father's wife; that she loved and worshiped her husband; and the idea of the duke's unworthiness and that this charming and good woman was without doubt united to a criminal, had completely unsettled her.

"If she knew, the unfortunate woman!" thought Annette. "What a horrible situation!"

Softened by the interview she had just had with Gaston, and rendered better by the hope of future happiness, she felt herself full of a great pity. The victim, now, was no longer herself, the daughter, who knew and who expected to free herself by a marriage into which the ardor of her love and her nature had drawn her; but it *was Jeanne*, who was to remain in that threatened house, and who was united to a man whose crimes might yet some day be exposed to the world.

She covered Jeanne with ardent kisses and feverish caresses, which greatly astonished the little duchess, who was little accustomed to such outbursts of affection on the part of her step-daughter.

"Oh, Jeanne! Jeanne!" she sobbed. "No, do not question me, but remember this: I love you with all my heart!"

"Nevertheless, I *cannot* tell her the truth, and I ought not to. It would kill her. I have no right to speak!" she thought. "May she always remain ignorant, always!"

Jeanne returned her caresses, with a kindness mixed with astonishment and uneasiness.

"She seems to be very sorry for me!" said the duchess to herself, agitated by secret fears. "But why?"

CHAPTER XIII.

CUCHILLO'S ACCOUNTANT.

THE evening of this same day, after dinner, the duke, in place of remaining with his wife and daughter as usual, retired to his study.

"I am not very well," he said to Jeanne, "and I passed a very bad night."

"You are not seriously ill?" she asked, with tender solicitude, mixed with a vague uneasiness stronger than the circumstances seemed to justify.

"No, no!" quickly replied the duke. "I only need a little rest." And, without awaiting a response and escaping farther inquiries, he hastily retired.

"I have been uneasy about your father for some days," said the duchess, sadly, when he had gone, addressing Annette. "He neither looks nor acts as usual."

Annette remained silent.

"Have you not also remarked it?"

"No!" replied Annette, without looking up.

As soon as he had arrived in his study, the duke, far from taking the repose which he had seemed to think so necessary, gave an order to have Monsieur Bernard sent to him. He had not seen him all day.

Louis Clermont, after his interview with Madame

Lapierre, had shut himself up in his own private apartment, and had not again come out of it.

Although he was in the house, and had been immediately informed of the duke's desire to see him, he waited some little time before complying with his grace's request.

On seeing him enter, at last, the duke hastened to close and lock the door, and, through an excess of precaution, even lowered the heavy curtains, which remained raised during the day, in order to thoroughly shut in the sound of their voices, so that no words they might utter could be heard from without.

Bernard watched him do this, and slightly trembled on seeing the discomposed features of the false duke.

"Oh, oh!" he thought, "still another difficulty. To the devil with this animal! He is decidedly too nervous, and gives me more trouble than a sucking child with the colic. Why cannot I dispense with him?"

But he carefully kept these reflections to himself, and waited to let Cuchillo speak.

"Bernard," said the latter, suddenly, and drawing near the other, so as not to have to elevate his voice, "I wish to know how we are off for money."

"If I had been forewarned, Monsieur le Duc, I would have brcught my books," replied Louis Clermont, in the obsequiously insolent tone which he adopted, under certain circumstances, when he found Cuchillo little disposed for familiarity.

"I do not need your books. How much can I have immediately?"

Bernard pricked up his ears and regarded his companion with surprise.

"By Jove! you know your resources as well as I do."

"Can I have thirty thousand francs within a few days?"

The steward opened his eyes very wide.

"What is the matter?" said he. "Have you been gambling? But no; you are as virtuous as a saint. You do not belong to any club. You never go out;

so it is not that. Then—ah! that *would* be droll! Can you be in love with some fashionable woman?"

"What is it to you?" replied the duke, violently. "I need money—a large sum—and that, not only now, but regularly."

"Ah! you do not wish to speak," thought Clermont. "Well, you shall speak all the same. Monsieur le Duc," he continued aloud, in his most cynical tone, "the amount you mentioned represents your annual income."

"But I have sixty thousand francs a year," interrupted Cuchillo, striking his hands against each other.

"Pardon me! you forget that thirty thousand go to a certain Louis Clermont. You share with him, as is just. And he is liberal, for he could have demanded more."

The duke made an angry gesture, but he immediately checked himself, and made a few turns across his study, with the tread of a lion enclosed in a cage. Louis Clermont followed him with a glance which was both derisive and interrogative.

"Very well," said Cuchillo, pausing; "I will sell the land; I will realize, but I must have money, at any cost!"

"I have no objection; sell! You settled on the duchess one hundred thousand francs when you married her. Your daughter, through her mother, is entitled to two hundred thousand, the interest on which you only receive until her majority or her marriage, when she will come into possession of the entire sum. There are then remaining nine hundred thousand francs, which you can realize, subject to the condition of paying into the said Louis Clermont's hands six hundred thousand francs. There will then be left to you three hundred thousand, which will bring you in an income of about fifteen thousand francs. That is yours. No one will dispute it; and you are at liberty to raise on this capital as many times thirty thousand francs as you choose."

Cuchillo, who at first listened in anger, now ap-

peared dejected. These figures fell one by one upon his head like so many drops of cold water.

He was not, in truth, ignorant in regard to the situation, but he had avoided thinking of or examining into it, and the retired life he led, and Jeanne's simple tastes, contributed to lull him into a partial delusion, in creating around him a relative abundance, which appeared genuine luxury to him, although in reality he only spent an income of thirty thousand francs, which Clermont allowed him.

"This is horrible!" he murmured, falling into a chair. "I have nothing. I do not belong to myself, and can do nothing!"

He was thinking of Mariquita. It was for her that he wanted this money. She was ruined; not by him, it is true, but because of him. He had wished to share his fortune with her. It was a duty, a strict duty, in his eyes. And the money of which he wished to dispose, by despoiling his wife, whom he worshiped, represented but a ridiculous sum, above all for Mariquita, whose expensive tastes and irregular way of living he well knew. He felt as if taken by the throat; choked by a sentiment of unspeakable shame. It seemed as if he had ruined this woman, whom he had loved so much and who had lost everything for him! Two large tears filled his eyes and then rolled slowly down his pale cheeks. Bernard shrugged his shoulders and uttered a sneering little laugh.

"How womanish!" he muttered. "Well, my good fellow," he added, with an air of contemptuous pity, "you never in the least understand life! The devil! This was our agreement. I repeat, I could have demanded more. I did not do so because, in regard to you, I am foolishly weak. I could have demanded, for instance, this realization of your fortune. And I probably shall, some day—"

Cuchillo raised his hand.

"Why?" he asked.

"How '*why?*' Decidedly you are too young for your age. Do you not understand, then, that if you should die it would be all up with your poor Cler-

mont? The whole fortune would go to your daughter and your wife, and this poor sheep would be shorn of his fleece. Now, that is exactly what he does not wish to happen. He has, therefore, made up his mind that, on the first good occasion which offers itself, you shall sell the estate of your papa, and he shall count with his own hands the six hundred thousand francs which your gratitude will make you offer him. If he has not done it sooner, it was because he was prudent and calculating. There is a depreciation, just now, in the value of real estate, and, besides, too sudden a sale might give birth to comments or awaken importunate attention. It is only three years since we left *la Plata.* You are well, and we have a plenty of time. You cannot say that I am not amiable, hey? I take as good care of you as if you were a pretty woman spoiled by her lovers."

Cuchillo arose with a bound, his eyes flashing. Clermont, who knew how violent he was, recoiled a step, putting his hand in a side pocket where he always carried a knife. One never knows what may happen, and prudence is the mother of safety.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCE.

THE two men measured each other for a moment with their eyes, then the expression of Cuchillo's face suddenly underwent a change, and passed from the fiercest threat to the cruellest anguish and the most violent discouragement. Clermont, who had not once taken his eyes off him, slowly withdrew his hands from his pocket.

"Say, my son," he said, in a conciliating tone, "why do you not confide in the old man, and why try to play it fine with him? You know that I can give good advice, and that you have never regretted listening to me. When I first knew you, you were poor. Now,

you are rich; for, after all, thirty thousand francs a year are not to be sneezed at. You are the Duke of Kandos, married to a charming woman, and installed in a handsome residence! To whom do you owe all this?"

"Oh! Why did you not leave me where I was?" murmured Cuchillo, bitterly.

"Why do you need this money?" said Clermont, returning to the original subject.

The false duke hesitated; but he was in one of those moments of weakness and despair in which one needs a confidant. He was powerless. Besides, Clermont was a man of resources, and Cuchillo, through custom, or cowardice, whichever one pleases, was in the habit of going to him for help whenever the burden became too heavy for his own shoulders.

"Eh! well, so be it!" said he, slowly. "I wished to keep it to myself, but you would have discovered it in time. You may as well know it now as in the future! Listen! as infamous and wicked as you are it is impossible for you to remain insensible to that which has passed, and, if there is anything human about you, you will understand my sorrows, and the sacred character of my duty."

"Go on; speak," said Clermont, who assumed his most familiar air, whenever his friend became sentimental.

Cuchillo drew near, and leaning towards the other whispered, rather than spoke, in his ear:

"Mariquita is not dead!"

Clermont gave a start.

"What are you talking about! Are you crazy?" and he regarded Cuchillo with a sort of gennine uneasiness.

"Alas! no. I tell you that she is alive."

"But—"

"I have seen her—"

"Where?"

"Here. Last night. She is in Paris, and I have spoken with her."

Cuchillo's accent was so distinct, and so thoroughly

carried conviction with it, that the steward's incredulity was shaken.

"Oh! oh!" he replied, without any sneer this time. "this might be very serious, in fact—. Tell me all."

They both sat down on a sofa and Cuchillo gave the old convict a faithful and exact report of all that Mariquita had told him. Clermont did not once interrupt him.

When Cuchillo had finished his long recital the other even then remained mute for some little time.

"This singularly complicates the situation," he finally grumbled between his teeth. "All the same she is a good girl, I have always felt a sympathy for her. So, she loves you as well as ever?" he continued, in a louder voice.

"Yes!"

"Well?"

"Well, I am married, and I love Jeanne!"

"What! You have sent her away? You have let her depart?"

"Clermont, we will not discuss these things," said Cuchillo, sadly. "There are feelings you cannot understand; but what, perhaps, you may be able to comprehend is that I cannot abandon her thus—. You would not do it, yourself, would you? She loves me and I also love her, not as I formerly did, but still very much. She has sacrificed herself for me. She has given her life for me. For me, she has lost her whole fortune. Now, she finds me married. She is alone, poor and unhappy. I cannot leave her like this. Here is a sacred duty, I repeat; one from which nothing in the world can release me. I can neither give up Jeanne nor abandon Mariquita. If I can no longer be her lover, I will be her brother. I would kill myself rather than fail in what I have resolved to do for her. Do you see, do you comprehend the situation, Clermont?"

"It is very simple. Mariquita loves you, and it is *you* she wants. Mariquita knows our secret, and can speak. Mariquita is dangerous. And, besides, between these two women I would not hesitate an in-

stant. She is worth a hundred times more than your affected little duchess."

"Be silent! I forbid you—"

"Well. I do not advise you to bring her here; that would provoke scandal and that is something we do not need. But, the devil! Mariquita must be consoled and satisfied. I know her: and it is not your money which will do it. In the first place you have next to none. Figures are figures—"

"What is there left to me?" murmured Cuchillo, pressing his hands to his forehead in despair, and seeing that he could obtain nothing from the old convict.

"Yourself!" said the latter, laughing sneeringly. "*Yourself! and yourself should be enough!* I believe that this will turn out something of a tragedy. This is what comes of your scruples!"

Cuchillo looked at him gloomily and in silence. What good was there in insisting or saying anything more! This man would never understand the frightful struggle which was going on within him. Now that he had spoken he no longer felt anything but a great lassitude.

"Where does she live?" suddenly resumed Bernard.

"I know nothing about it."

"Idiot! You should have asked her."

"She refused to tell me, and said that she would let me hear from her."

"But she will not, you fool!" cried the convict angrily. "She is jealous, and is not to be trifled with. Above all, we must not give her time for reflection."

"What do you intend to do?"

"To see her!"

"How?"

"Rest easy, I will find her address."

"And then?"

"Then! You will do what is necessary, do you hear? This does not concern you alone, you and your sentimental fooleries. It also concerns *me!* There are two women—one too many. We will hasten to the most pressing, the most dangerous, the most vindictive—.

Thunder and lightning! we are in a nice mess, thanks to you! When I have seen Mariquita and conversed with her I will know what is going on; and you shall do what I tell you—"

"Clermont!"

"Ah! that is enough! Do you prefer the scaffold?"

"But, Jeanne—"

"Eh, well, and afterward? She will be the widow of an executed assassin. Now, Mariquita is capable of anything, if she is irritated, or driven to extremities—"

"You calumniate her. Besides, she loves me, and I—"

"Parbleu! her love is a plank of safety; without it, I would not give four cents for our hides."

"She has accepted my friendship, I tell you!"

The other shrugged his shoulders with such an expression of ironical contempt, that Cuchillo suddenly shivered from terror.

"To-morrow," resumed Clermont, "I will start in search of her and I will find her. Then, I will discover what she is up to, and we can lay our plans accordingly. But enough on this subject!"

Cuchillo was about to reply, when there was a knock at the study door.

For a moment the two men looked at each other uneasily, then Bernard, reusming as well as he could the face of a faithful and honest steward, went to answer the door. The duke's valet entered.

"What is it, Germain?" demanded Cuchillo, in a voice which he forced himself to render calm and indifferent.

"A letter, which has just arrived, for Monsieur le duc."

"Very well, you can leave us."

And Cuchillo, greatly excited, tore open the envelope.

CHAPTER XV.

BERNARD ASSUMES ALL THE MERIT OF SUCCESS.

THE letter contained but a few lines, and Cuchillo glanced at the signature before reading it. His face immediately assumed an expression of intense surprise, and, at the same time, a mixture of relief and of being mistaken.

"What is it?" said Clermont, roughly snatching it from his hands. "Ah! ah!" he instantly added, on reading the signature: "'Gaston Lapierre!'"

"Another terrible and cruel complication!" murmured the duke. "I had believed the letter was from Mariquita."

"Let us see what the fellow says!" said Clermont, and he read aloud, as follows:

"MONSIEUR LE DUC:

"Yesterday, when you offered me the hand of Mademoiselle Annette de Kandos, at the greatness of this happiness, which I had so little expected, I lost my head——"

"I believed myself unworthy of it, and my conduct must have appeared inexplicable to you.

"Will you please forget it?

"I now joyfully accept this alliance which then frightened me, and since you have considered it as possible, I dare to ask you to hasten a union without which my life would be utterly hopeless.

"Will you please to accept, monsieur le duc, the homage of my respect and gratitude.

"GASTON LAPIERRE."

Evidently Gaston had followed, without loss of time,

Annette's advice, and had immediately executed the promise he had made her.

"What does this mean?" asked Cuchillo, very much astonished, taking back the letter which Clermont handed him. "This is a singular proceeding, and has something strange about it."

The old convict sneered with an air of triumph.

"Let this prove to you, once more, Clermont's superiority! and let it demonstrate that you would be worse than helpless without him."

"What do you mean?"

"You owe this sudden change to me, my good fellow. This was a serious danger. This young man might have inconvenienced us terribly. Did he not come to you, in a burst of honesty, to reveal who I am? What could you have done? How would you have come out of it? Don't you see that the young one, Annette, would have wished to know why the man she loved had refused her hand? And when she had learned who I was, as she would have done from her lover, she would not have been long in guessing what you, yourself, are, in discovering that you are not her father, but her father's assassin——"

"Be silent, wretch!" exclaimed Cuchillo, with fright.

"Well, it is poor Bernard who has parried the blow. I cannot say that I have dictated this letter. I wished that Monsieur Gaston Lapierre, my son, should accept this marriage which he had refused with the airs of a Don Quixote, and he has accepted. Oh! *virtue* always makes me laugh." And, in fact, the convict gave one of those sardonic chuckles which he called a laugh.

"How, is it you——"

"Exactly!"

"I do not comprehend!"

"Still, it is very simple."

"The difficulty which made this young man hesitate has not been done away with."

"What difficulty?"

"Are you not still his father?"

"Certainly!"

"Will it not still be necessary for him, in order to

get married, to furnish his papers and resume his real name, and thus acknowledge to me who and what you are; and, then, all that you fear will be realized!"

Clermont shrugged his shoulders.

"Fool! Do you know why I was so long in coming when you sent for me this evening?"

"No."

"It was because I was working for the happiness of these two loving children. I was playing the part of Providence, in my own room, by regularly preparing all the documents which prove the death of one Louis Clermont, who was found dead on the *pampa*."

Cuchillo gazed at him in astonishment.

"You do not understand? Nevertheless it is admirably simple. Listen!" And he tranquilly and minutely explained to his companion the plan he had disclosed to his wife, the execution of which he had already commenced. "In this way," concluded the sham steward, "all becomes easy. The young man no longer has anything to tell you. You are supposed to be ignorant of my existence, happy Mademoiselle Annette blesses you, and my son, united to your supposed daughter, becomes henceforth an accomplice, would let himself be cut into mince-meat rather than say a word which might injure our profitable business."

"It is true," replied Cuchillo, with an involuntary admiration for the other's powers, so audacious and fertile in resources. He uttered a sigh of relief, and, for a moment, his anxious brow became serene.

Annette, at least, would be happy, and the happiness of his brother's daughter was one of the most cherished desires of his life.

"What amuses me," pursued Clermont, with an expression of triumphant cynicism, "is to observe that all men are alike. Now, here is Monsieur Gaston, my son. He effects the puritan and the fastidious. He is always speaking of duty and honor. One would have supposed that he would break his heart or die rather than soil in any way what he calls his honor. But observe! All this is because he believes the marriage to be impossible. I have only had to prove to him

that he could take the young lady and her dowry, and he has become as soft and pliable as a glove. One would have sworn that he was about to send papa to the scaffold, and he has become his accomplice. Ah! I shall split my sides over it for a long time!"

We know that the convict deceived himself. Gaston had not yielded to the cowardly, selfish and interested calculations which his father had attributed to him. He had done his duty in revealing the truth to Annette; but her counter-revelations had completely changed the situation. His duty, now, was to snatch the young girl from the midst of infamy, to unite both their destinies already stamped with the same seal, and, without accepting any portion whatever of a fortune they both despised, to go far away and help to found an honest race.

When he had returned to his mother, the latter, with unspeakable anguish and a thousand precautions, had told Gaston of his father's visit and of his proposed plans. This would have dissipated the young man's last doubts, if he had still preserved any.

"Annette was right," he thought. "She said: 'Your father's words prove that there is an understanding with the duke, and that they have found some way of assuring our marriage.'"

Clermont's propositions came so very opportunely, and answered so well to Mademoiselle de Kandos's foresight, that there was no longer any cause for hesitation.

"I accept!" he said to his mother, who was astounded, yet, at the same time, happy at this sudden resolution, which corresponded with the secret desires of her maternal heart.

"He is saved, and will weep no more!" this was her first thought, and which over-ruled all others.

"Dear mother," added Gaston, "do not question me, nor seek to know the motives which dictate my conduct, so unlike, apparently, what it should be. If for once in my life I have a secret from you—it is because the secret is not my own."

Gaston did not think it right to repeat, even to his mother, that which his *fiancée* had confided to him.

Did it not belong to her alone to make this confidence, whenever she judged it useful or proper?

"I know you to be good, courageous and honorable," replied Madame Lapierre, embracing him; "so keep your secret, my child! provided you at last enjoy life, which, until now, has been so hard for you, what matters the rest?"

It was then that Gaston wrote the letter we have heard Clermont read aloud.

"This affair is all settled," concluded the latter, addressing Cuchillo. "From this quarter, there is nothing more to be feared; Mariquita, alone, remains. I must find her again and see her. Leave it to me to arrange this affair, also, and you will find that you have done wisely."

CHAPTER XVI.

CLERMONT BELIEVES IN PROVIDENCE MORE THAN EVER.

LOUIS CLERMONT never lost any time when he had anything to do. So, early the next morning, he started out on his search for Mariquita.

He wished to see her, to feel his ground, to know clearly what danger this new complication, so unforeseen, threatened them, and ready to come to a decision according to circumstances; but resolved, at all events, to recoil at nothing in order to ward off danger and save the position they had conquered with so much difficulty.

Meanwhile, he had no violent or evil intentions against the *Marquesa.*

Provided that she did not demand money, which would have been to infringe on his province; and provided she remained silent in regard to the past of Cuchillo and of Bernard, the steward, he was disposed to make her all the concessions imaginable and to enter into arrangements with her.

His search was longer and more difficult than he had at first imagined it would be. It is not very easy to find a person in Paris, when one is absolutely ignorant of that person's address and can take no one into one's confidence.

But the old convict was endowed with a remarkable scent and a sort of divination in affairs of this kind. Besides, chance served him. He told himself that the Marquesa, not having much money and wishing to remain unknown, since she was pursuing a private vengeance, when she arrived at Paris, must have chosen a retired quarter of the city and one little frequented

by a certain class, and it was in this direction that he conducted his search.

Clermont also knew that she had with her a negro, the duke having spoken to him of Mono, and the part he had played in the fire, at Buenos Ayres.

For three days he had hunted over Paris, studying above all the more retired streets, when, in crossing the Austerlitz bridge, he perceived a young negro of vigorous and resolute aspect. He followed him, saw him enter a house in Cuvier street, went in after him, questioned the concierge, and learned with joy that he was at last successful.

"Decidedly Providence continues to smile upon me!" said he to himself, with a sardonic smile. And, without hesitation, he mounted the stairs and rang at the door leading to the apartments of Madame Dolorès de Los Rios.

Mono, for it was indeed he whom Clermont had followed, had entered a few minutes previously.

"Where is the mistress?" he quickly asked Carmencita, who had opened the door for him.

"In her boudoir!" answered the little half-breed.

"Go and tell her that I wish to speak with her."

"I believe she is taking her *siesta*, and I dare not awaken her."

"Nevertheless, it is necessary!" replied Mono.

Carmencita no longer insisted, and, stepping lightly on the tips of her toes, she gained the end of the room, raised a curtain, and found herself in the chamber where we first saw Mariquita.

The latter was now dressed in a light silk dressing-gown which moulded itself to her magnificent form; her eyes were wide open and she was not asleep, although lying perfectly motionless on the divan we already know. Her face was very pale and bore the evident traces of unrest, and she seemed plunged into deep reflections.

Carmencita, seeing she was awake, advanced softly and timidly and stopped at about two paces from her mistress, waiting for the latter to interrogate her. But the Marquesa did not appear to notice her presence.

"Mistress!" said the little maid in a soft voice.

Mariquita did not move.

"Mistress!" repeated the *China*, slightly raising her voice.

Mariquita trembled, as if torn from some dream, arose, and at length perceived Carmencita.

"Why do you disturb me?" she angrily said, drawing her black eyebrows together. "What do you want?"

"Mistress, Mono wishes to speak to you. He said it was 'necessary' that he should see you instantly."

The creole trembled again.

"Ah!" said she quickly. "That is different. Let him come!"

And she threw herself back again on the divan, while Carmencita hastened rapidly away.

Two seconds later Mono entered the boudoir, advanced towards his mistress, knelt before her and carried to his thick lips the fine white hand which she let him take.

"Well?" said she, questioning him more with her eyes than her voice.

"Louis Clermont follows me."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely, mistress. For three days, according to your orders, I have not lost sight of the hotel occupied by Cuchillo. On the two first I did not show myself to Clermont, who went out early every morning and did not return until night. I wished, in the first place, to assure myself if it was really you he was in search of; and, besides, he would not have believed too sudden a meeting to be a chance one."

"So," murmured the Marquesa, in a strange tone, "*he* does not even search for me; it is the other!"

A cloud passed over her forehead. Perhaps she was about to add something more when the sound of the door-bell was heard.

"You hear, mistress?" exclaimed Mono. "He is here! What shall I do?"

"Introduce him!" resolutely replied Dolorés.

Mono arose.

"Only do not forget to make him wait—"

"I know, mistress!" and Mono disappeared. He arrived at the door just as Carmencita opened it to the visitor, and found himself face to face with Louis Clermont.

"Does Madame de Los Rios reside here?" asked the latter, who had assumed his pleasantest expression.

"Yes, sir," said Carmencita.

"Is she visible?"

The little maid turned to Mono, as if for instructions.

"The mistress is visible," replied Mono. "Whom shall I announce?"

"Monsieur Bernard, the steward of the Duke of Kandos."

"Very well, monsieur. Please to follow me." And, going ahead to show the way, Mono opened the door of the dining-room, into which they entered.

This room was encumbered with trunks and boxes, the first half full of women's clothes, and the latter already closed and nailed up. Everywhere in the room was visible the disorder attendant on breaking up housekeeping.

"Will monsieur please to wait here a moment," said Mono, "while I go to announce him?" And he left Clermont alone.

"Oh! oh!" said the latter, when the negro was gone. "What does this mean?"

He threw a rapid glance around him, inspecting the disorder with the quickness and clearness of an auctioneer.

"Is she going away?"

He approached the open trunks with a light step.

"Hum!" said he, "the packing-up is too serious for a simple change of residence."

Suddenly his roving eye perceived a brass plate nailed on one of the boxes, on which a few lines had been painted with a brush.

He hastened, or, rather, bounded, to its side, and, stooping eagerly over it, read, written in Spanish:

"SENORA DOLORÈS DE LOS RIOS."

Then, underneath, more recently added, the following words:

"BUENOS AYRES,
"LA PLATA.
"(VIA INGLATERRA.)"

"Oh! oh!" murmured Clermont. "Is she going back there? The devil! this will suit us nicely! Brave girl! I would gladly embrace her for this wise resolution, which simplifies everything. But, if this is the fact, we must pretend to regret it, and not appear too well satisfied. On the contrary—I know her. She would be capable of changing her mind."

When Mono returned to tell the visitor that his mistress was ready to receive him, Louis Clermont was attentively examining an engraving on the wall which represented a bull-fight at Seville.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON WHEELS.

"MISTRESS awaits Monsieur," said the negro, affecting the dialect of the people of his color, as he always did before strangers.

"I am ready, my friend," replied the steward, promptly.

They passed through a *salon*, which was almost as encumbered as the dining-room, and revealed, beyond a doubt, an approaching departure for some distant country, and, Mono raising a curtain, Clermont found himself in the presence of Mariquita.

She had lighted a cigarette, and, lying nonchalantly back on her sofa, was smoking.

"*Buenos dias, amigo,*" said she, in Spanish, tendering him her beautiful hand, with a smile.

This reception, so different from what he had expected, or, rather, doubted, for it is always imprudent to expect in regard to women, delighted the old convict.

"Well," said he, mentally, "this looks well." And he continued, aloud: "*Carajo!* I discover you at last! But it has been difficult. However, I am more than paid for all my labor in finding you still so beautiful and charming. We are old friends, and I have always had a weakness for you. But what a devil of an idea it was to conceal your address from us!"

"Ah! my dear friend," replied Mariquita, "you know very well what has happened. I worship Cuchillo. I come to Paris to avenge him, as he avenged me."

"Yes; he has told me all."

"Well, I find him living, and married. The blow was a hard one."

"Pshaw! What does that amount to? He could not do otherwise. I do not say but that it is unfortunate, but there are always means of arranging such affairs—"

"Very true. Only, he no longer loves me."

Clermont pricked up his ears, uneasily.

"That is the direction of the wind!" he thought. "Let us keep a sharp look-out and see what comes next."

While he was preparing for the assault of reproaches, tears and threats, which he expected, the Marquesa, in place of continuing her discourse, suddenly paused and clapped her hands together three times.

Carmencita immediately appeared in the half-open doorway.

"The *yerba!*" said the creole.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the *ex-gaucho*, with an air of assumed pleasure, and decided not to be the first to attack the subject which occupied his thoughts. "I

see that you have not forgotten your good American habits."

"My faith, no. I have in no wise become a Parisian, and it is scarcely worth while trying now."

"This is an allusion to her approaching departure!" said Clermont to himself, joyfully.

Carmencita now re-entered with an urn of *yerba.* She first offered it to Mariquita, who slowly sipped the hot liquid through a long silver tube placed in the urn, which was ornamented with rich arabesque patterns.

The little half-breed stood erect and motionless near her mistress, and the old convict, greatly puzzled and completely baffled by these tranquil proceedings, preserved silence, fearing to commit an imprudence if he said a word, to awake, as the saying is, *a sleeping cat.*

When through, Mariquita offered the silver tube to Clermont, who, in turn, placed it to his lips.

"One would believe himself in Buenos-Ayres," said he, between two swallows. He was commencing to get impatient. It was not to drink *yerba* that he had come to Cuvier street.

"Buenos-Ayres," repeated the *Porteña,* "I am about to return there."

Clermont swallowed a mouthful the wrong way.

"Ah! indeed!"

"What good is there in remaining here? What can I do? Paris only recall unpleasant memories. It was here that I married Paul de Kandos; and I hated him. I return here and I find the man I loved, the only one I ever loved, married to another woman, having forgotten me—. So, I am going to try and forget him. Besides, I have no longer any money, and one cannot live in Paris without *that.*"

"Now we are coming to it!" thought Clermont, but he said aloud quickly: "Well, I understand your irritation. I have never loved, myself, nor been entangled in any love affair. I am not such a fool. Only, if, by chance, I had ever loved, and been loved, I feel that it would not have lasted long. I would have said 'good evening!' to my sweet-heart, and sought another."

"So," resumed Mariquita, fixing her dark eyes upon him, "he does not love me any longer! It is all over!"

"Oh! I do not say that!" replied Cuchillo's friend, feeling that he had gone too far. "The proof to the contrary is that I have been looking for you everywhere, and that poor Cuchillo is in despair over the manner in which you parted from each other."

The *Marquesa* withdrew her eyes from him, and Clermont handed the urn to Carmencita, who then left the apartment.

"It appears that the duchess is charming," tranquilly continued Mariquita.

"Pooh! that depends on tastes. I find her most insipid!"

"Poor Cuchillo! He was very unhappy on seeing me again. I pitied him, when he had to acknowledge his marriage to me. Poor friend! He is kind hearted. It grieves him to grieve me. If I remained here we would mutually suffer, without profit to either of us. I am not the woman to share with a rival, and in his position, I understand his hesitation and regret. If I remained here, near him, I should come to hate him. I prefer preserving a kind remembrance of my only love, very much cooled, nevertheless, and returning across the seas."

"What will you do there?"

"Oh! I do not know!" She smilingly looked at him, and added: "Your question is not complimentary. I no longer have a voice, but I am still beautiful, and *all* my adorers will not have forgotten me."

"Here is a woman whom I understand," said Clermont apart, and then to her: "That is something like! What a humbug love is."

The conversation was continued in this strain for nearly half an hour, re-assuring and delighting Louis Clermont.

"I will leave here in eight days," she finally said.

"I can see you again?"

"Certainly. You can come and bid me farewell, *amigo.*"

"*Carajo!* I certainly will! I will accompany you to

the railway, and even further; I will go with you to the place you sail from—. By the way, *mujer*,* where *do* you sail from?"

"Havre."

"Well, I will go with you to Havre—and—if you should happen to need a few thousand francs, you know you can count on me for them."

"I can get them back again from Cuchillo," he mentally added.

"Thanks! I have enough for the voyage. And on the other side—"

"Oh! *there* the coins will shower upon you. So then, it is understood that I will see you again soon. I will return in two or three days."

"*Hasta la vista!*" replied Mariquita, again giving him her hand, which was rather cold. * * * * *

"Well, my old woman!" said Clermont to Cuchillo, when he had returned to the duke's and they were alone together, "I do not understand those who scoff at Providence. There is one! That is certain—. And you have better luck than your fooleries merit. The Marquesa departs. In eight days I will ship her, at Havre, for La Plata. We are saved! Thank God!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PROVIDENCE DEPARTS.

A FEELING of calmness had entered into the hearts of most of the personages of our narrative, and, for a long time, the different inmates of the duke's mansion had not felt so happy.

Annette knew that Gaston had written to her father, and that the duke had most favorably answered the man she loved.

Her marriage was formally agreed to.

In a few weeks more she would be Gaston's wife

* *Mujer*, a familiar name applied to women in Spanish.

and would leave, with him, this house in which she had suffered so much; and where she had never been happy, in spite of the sincere affection she bore the little duchess.

For Annette, everything else disappeared in anticipation of this great happiness; and the grief, which Jeanne's situation caused her, almost disappeared before the immense joy with which this idea filled her heart.

"After all, she knows nothing, and he seems to love her," she said to herself with the selfishness belonging to a young girl in love.

Gaston, also, in spite of occasional uneasiness, and vague remorse for the sort of complicity he had accepted with his father, lived in a state of genuine ecstasy.

The struggle was over, and, his eyes fixed on the approaching end, he saw nothing else, neither on this side nor on that. His *fiancée* was happy; so was his mother—. He was going to marry her whom he had believed forever lost to him. Was there nothing in all this to intoxicate his youth?

As for Cuchillo, he too commenced to recover from the effects of all these cruel blows of fortune.

Annette's marriage would cause him the greatest relief; it was the realization of one of the dreams, one of the duties, of his new life.

It seemed to him that in assuring the happiness of his brother Paul's daughter he was making some atonement for the blood shed by him.

On the other hand, Mariquita, from what Clermont had told him, was going to return to Buenos-Ayres, already consoled for having been deceived.

What better could he desire?

Certainly, he would preserve a tender recollection of her, and one full of devoted affection. He told himself that he would watch over her welfare from a distance, and that if ever the time should come when she would need assistance he would know how to prove to her the sincerity and gratitude of his affection. The unexpected departure and resignation of the *Marquesa*

would deliver him from the most frightful of sufferings and the most terrible of threats.

Henceforth his life would be easy and simple. Jeanne was saved. She would be happy, and provided that was the case, what else was there to sigh after?

As to the little duchess, she saw that her husband's face was calmer and that Annette was happy; and that sufficed to fill her own heart with joy.

It is almost useless to refer to Clermont.

He rolled in happiness, and weaved himself crowns, attributing all to his own great ability and to Providence's affection for him.

He "closed his beak" to his son, as he called it, and got out of his way. No more danger from that source.

The *Marquesa* gone, carrying in her trunk the last cloud which could darken the horizon, and demanding no money, was a great thing; for, after all, he knew very well that being himself as badly threatened as Cuchillo by this unexpected resurrection, which upset all his calculations, he would have been constrained to contribute from his own purse in order to purchase the creole's silence or to indemnify her.

The very next day after the one which had cast so much sunlight into the lives of all these different personages the duchess's maid entered the little *salon* where Gaston and Annette had had their reconciliation. Jeanne was there alone.

"Madame," said the servant to her mistress, "a lady wishes to speak to you."

"Did she give her name?"

"She refused, saying that she did not wish to speak it to any save yourself."

"What style of person is she?" resumed Jeanne, surprised.

"She has a very respectable air; and is richly dressed, although in a very original manner."

"You are sure of never having seen her before?"

"Oh! certainly, madame."

Jeanne hesitated an instant.

"Very well," she at length said. "Show her into the drawing-room, I will see her there, presently."

A few minutes later she descended to the drawing-room and found herself in the presence of a lady, very richly dressed, indeed, but in black, whose face was entirely covered by a thick and long black lace veil.

This stately woman, of whose face nothing but a pair of bright black eyes could be distinguished through her veil, watched the duchess advance without making the least gesture.

Her look had something about it so penetrating, so acute, and was so full of fire, that it caused the little duchess a certain uneasiness.

"To whom have I the honor of speaking?" she asked, with the affable tone peculiar to herself, which gained so many hearts by its sound alone.

"I am about to tell you, madame," replied the stranger, in that deep, guttural voice belonging to Spaniards, but with a solemn and slightly threatening intonation which struck disagreeably upon the ears of the young wife.

"I am listening," said Jeanne, a little more coolly, and pointing to a chair.

Mariquita, the reader has already guessed it was she, slowly threw back the veil which covered her face and shoulders, and appeared in all the splendor of her creole beauty and Argentine costume.

Under her veil she wore a long black satin dress, very short-sleeved and low-necked, which marvellously suited her magnificent figure.

The little duchess could not restrain a look of surprise mixed with admiration. But the glance fixed on her was so burning and obstinately searching, that she became more uneasy than ever.

Both women stood a moment face to face, studying and analyzing each other with that rapidity of intuition peculiar to their sex. In proportion as they considered each other the expressions of their eyes changed. The *Marquesa*, on seeing how pretty the little duchess was in her delicate gracefulness, experienced a secret anger and felt her heart filling more and more with hatred. Jeanne divined these sentiments, and her blue

eyes now said very plainly that she knew she was in the presence of an enemy.

She was the first to break the silence.

"I am listening to you, madame," said she for the second time, and she seated herself.

Mariquita sat down opposite to her, and said:

"Are you Madame la Duchesse de Kandos?"

"Yes, madame."

"And you married Monsieur Paul de Kandos, two years ago, on his return from America?"

"Yes, madame. But why these questions? You have not yet told me your name, nor who you are, and it was in that way, it seems to me, that you should have commenced."

"Who I am and my name you will learn presently. Will you only grant me two minutes of close attention?"

Jeanne assumed a position of polite resignation. The uneasiness with which the sight and the tone of the strange visitor had inspired her had increased. She felt that she was about to hear something very serious.

"When you married the Duke of Kandos, did you know that he had been married, a long time before, at Paris?"

Jeanne bowed her head in token of assent.

"He then married a young girl named Mariquita Antequerra, by whom he had a daughter, who bears the name of Annette."

"Yes, certainly—" interrupted the little duchess. "But, once more, why do you speak to me of all this, madame, and what do these questions mean?"

The *Marquesa* arose, pale, a smile on her lips, and triumph in her black eyes.

"You do not know why, madame?"

"Not the least in the world," said Jeanne, greatly moved and rising in turn. "I so little know why, madame, that I shall be obliged to withdraw, if you persist in not telling me who you are and why you have come here."

The little duchess did not absolutely tell an untruth

when she said that she knew nothing; but, still, she foresaw something evil, for she was afraid.

"Madame," replied Mariquita, in a harsh voice, and advancing on the young wife, with the look of a falcon precipitating itself upon the bird it is about to make its prey, "Paul de Kandos believed himself a widower, and he was not; his first wife was supposed to be dead, but she is alive. I am the Duchess of Kandos, and I return to my own house!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A BIGAMIST OR WHAT?

ONE can now easily understand Mariquita's apparent resignation. On finding Cuchillo married to, and in love with another woman, her first idea had been to kill the latter. But this desire had not lasted. She loved Cuchillo more than she hated her rival. She could have given her life to him; she could *not* abandon him, accept the present state of affairs, and withdraw before another woman. She had never even dreamed of doing so. She did not wish to hurt him, to denounce him, to deliver him up. She only wished to drive Jeanne away, to separate him from her; to make this woman feel a little of the anguish she herself had endured.

What she feared was that Cuchillo, in order to escape her anger or her demands, might flee with his wife. She fully understood how difficult, not to say impossible, it would be for her to find him again; being, as she soon would be, destitute of means, and unwilling to put the police on his track.

Now, on reflection, the following thought came to her: that as long as Paul de Kandos was living *she* was the true duchess, the legitimate, the legal and the *only* wife!

There would be hundreds of witnesses to recognize

her, on the day when she should come to reveal her existence and appeal to them to identify her.

Mono would relate how he had saved her from the flames. His recital could be confirmed by old Irma, *the mother of the blacks.* She would not even need all this. She would call upon Cuchillo himself. Would he dare to say to his wife: "I am not Paul de Kandos: I am his murderer! I am Jean Pruneau, nicknamed, at the galleys, Cuchillo?"

"No," she replied to herself: "He would never dare that; he *could not* do it. And, besides, even if he had the necessary courage, what good would it do him? His wife would then fly from him in horror. Therefore, in one way or the other, their union will be broken up: whether she withdraws before me, or flies terrified from him."

Would he love Mariquita any the better for this?

She thought not of that, but only of the results of her proposed action. She fondly hoped that he would soon forget his new love, once parted from her who had inspired it; and that the cinders of the past would little by little rekindle themselves, under the influence of her ardent breath.

And Jeanne, innocent of everything, it was she whom she was going to strike and wound, if not kill. Had she no pity? The woman who pities another, when her selfishness, her love or her vanity is concerned, is the rarest phenomenon in all nature.

Now, we can return to the two women we left face to face at the moment when the *Marquesa* had said to Jeanne:

"I am the Duchess of Kandos, and have returned to my own house."

The shock astounded the young wife, more than it grieved her. In the first place, she did not believe it.

"You are crazy, madame!" she replied, shrugging her shoulders. "All the world knows that the person of whom you speak died at Buenos-Ayres, when her house was burned down. The duke's, *my husband's* whole family has worn mourning for this unhappy woman,

and I, myself, have seen a copy of her death certificate. It must even be here yet among the duke's papers."

"In fact, madame, I know that they published a report of the death of the Marquise de Kandos, at that time separated from her husband; and if I have never yet contradicted it, nor proved that I was alive, it was because I had reasons which it is unnecessary for me to tell you. But these reasons have disappeared, and here I am, determined to have myself recognized and to resume my name and title—and all my rights as only legitimate wife of Paul, the Duke of Kandos."

She had raised her voice, while speaking, with an assurance somewhat disdainful, overwhelming her whom she addressed with an implacable smile and such a cruelly victorious glance, that Jeanne recoiled before it in a state of distraction and a prey to unspeakable anguish.

The *Marquesa* saw the effect she had produced.

"You commence to believe me, do you not?" she resumed, in a sarcastic tone which struck the little duchess to the heart. "You begin to understand, that, not being mad, which is plainly evident, I can prove what I assert?"

"No! no! it is not true—it is impossihle!" violently exclaimed Jeanne, her face covered with a cold perspiration. "I do not know what I have ever done to you, I do not know the object of this abominable comedy—but, you are lying—you must be lying. I will listen to you no longer. Go, madame. I am here in my own house."

"That is where you deceive yourself; you are in mine, since you are in the duke's."

Jeanne bounded towards the mantel-piece, seized a bell-rope and pulled it violently.

"Well, madame, *he* shall tell you to leave!"

"If you are going to call him to tell him that I am Mariquita Antequerra, Duchess of Kandos, go on and do so. That will, in fact, simplify and end it all."

"Yes, yes, he shall come, he shall come!" murmured the young wife, in a paroxysm of terror and excitement.

A servant entered.

"Jean, go and tell my husband to come down to the drawing-room, where I am waiting for him. Let him come immediately!" she exclaimed, recovering her voice and endeavoring to keep up a good countenance before the servant.

The latter departed, and the two women were again left alone with each other. Neither said a word. Jeanne rubbed her feverish little hands together, her eyes fixed on the door. Mariquita also regarded it with her bold eyes, although she had become a trifle pale. Thus passed two or three moments of solemn silence, broken only by Jeanne's panting breathing.

Finally the door opened and Cuchillo appeared.

Mariquita made not the slightest movement.

"Paul," cried the little duchess, hastening towards her husband with a violence he was unaccustomed to, in her, and which greatly surprised him, "here is a woman who pretends she is your first wife, and calls herself the Duchess of Kandos!"

And, drawing to one side, she disclosed the *Porteña*, and pointed to her with a quick gesture.

Cuchillo made a step forward, perceived the creole, and remained motionless where he stood, paler than a corpse, and his mouth half opened for a cry of pain, which, however, was stopped in his throat as if the latter had been suddenly clasped in a vise.

CHAPTER XX.

DUCHESS, BUT NO DUKE.

IN speaking Jeanne had turned her face from her husband in order to look at the strange woman. The latter stood erect and looked proudly in the duke's face with a defiant smile on her lips, but her eyes were full of a strange expression, at once tender, threatening and victorious.

Her husband's perfect silence, under such circumstances, attracted Jeanne's attention towards him, and she could not refrain from crying out on observing the discomposure of his features, and the terrible agony depicted on them.

"Speak, Paul! Reply to this woman. Tell her that she lies," cried the little duchess, her heart pierced by a sharp pain.

"He will not give me the lie, madame," replied Mariquita, in a sombre voice. "Monsieur le duc recognizes me perfectly well. He knows, and will not deny, that I am Mariquita; and he also knows, and will not deny either, that I am the legitimate wife of Paul de Kandos, and that I alone have the right to bear the title which he has given to you."

"Paul! Paul!" murmured Jeanne de Léon, throwing herself into her husband's arms in a sort of desperate rage, "speak! why do you not speak? Is it true, what this woman says? Is it true?"

"*It is true!*" at length said Cuchillo in a dull voice, and he caught his wife to his breast, regarding the creole with more of sadness than of anger. "I believed she was dead, and that I was free. I married you; she knows that neither are you, nor I to blame. She knows that I would give my life rather than aban-

don or renounce you. And, if she does not know it, I now tell her it is so! Ah! unhappy woman!" he added, addressing himself to Mariquita, "what have you done here?"

Mariquita looked on at this scene, her heart pierced by all the serpents of jealousy. She felt herself becoming mad with fury; she was ready to throw herself upon these two lovers and separate them by violence. Her hand had already seized a small poniard around the handle of which her long fingers had closed like iron pincers. The veins stood out on her white arms.

Cuchillo know her too well not to thoroughly understand her sentiments. He was afraid for Jeanne. He pushed the latter from his breast, on which she had been sobbing, and, throwing himself forward, exclaimed:

"Oh! yes, kill me! It will be a deliverance."

"No, not you!" murmured Mariquita, brandishing her weapon.

Jeanne did not hear this answer, she saw only the gesture, and, with a single bound, she was between her husband and the true Duchess of Kandos.

"Stop, madam!" she gasped, offering her own bobom to the knife, in order to protect Cuchillo, surprised by this sudden movement.

The *Portena* recoiled before this beautiful woman, whose blonde hair had become loose and whose soft and delicate features breathed only the suffering and heroism of love without any anger or malice against her rival, and threw her poniard far from her.

"Madam," continued Jeanne, with exaltation of spirit, "pardon me. There are things here which I do not understand very well. But what matter it? You are the Duchess of Kandos. It is horrible—it drives me mad—but it is true. Do not believe that I wish to dispute your rights with you, or to steal your place. Oh! my God! my God! Still, this is not my fault. We loved each other. Excuse me, that is a crime in your eyes. I will depart— you are in your own house —you have told me so very brutally; you could, and should have spared me a little more. Well, I will not

struggle against it, you are the legal wife, I am no longer anything. I leave—Oh! I leave! I will forgive you, if you make him as happy as he deserves."

She stopped, passed her hand over her forehead, and threw around her a glance in which the fever had dried the tears.

"Adieu! Adieu!" she said, to the inert objects and the cold walls, which had been the nest of her love and was now its tomb. "Adieu! All! Everything! Adieu! Oh! this woman, this woman! I do not wish to die in her presence!"

She staggered and fell into Cuchillo's outstretched arms. He pressed his lips to hers, and the kiss reanimated her. She made a movement as if to arise and tear herself away, but he restrained her.

"Remain, Jeanne!" he said in a resolute voice. "You shall not go away, thus. I do not wish it, and you do not need to. *She* knows that as well as I do."

"I know only one thing," replied the creole, in a piercing voice, which echoed the tempest within her, "which is, that I am the Duchess of Kandos, that I am at the Duke of Kandos's and that I remain here! So it is for her to leave."

"Mariquita, as you have loved me, do not do this! It will be worse than death and more frightful than the most horrible of tortures. There is no hatred in the world, pitiless as it might be, which would wish to strike me in this manner. Mariquita, it is impossible that your heart can have become so hard that it cannot be moved!"

"I love you!" said she, fiercely.

"Mariquita, be merciful to *her!*"

"Who would be merciful to me? Here, enough of this! It must be ended. I am your wife. I cannot help it!"

"I am going! I am going!" repeated the little duchess, recovering herself; and, tearing herself from her husband with unexpected force, she direct-

ed her steps, without staggering, automatically, towards the door.

But Cuchillo had bounded before this door. His face was imprinted with so much resolution, was so like that of a martyr marching to the stake, and was so full of resignation that Jeanne paused and Mariquita felt a shiver run through her.

"Remain, Jeanne," resumed Cuchillo, in a firm voice. "This woman, who pretends to love me, has condemned me. Listen to me, as one listens to the dying. My life is finished. If I was not resolved to die, I would not say what I am going to say. I am, in my turn, going to hurt you more cruelly than this woman has, but I expect—." A sob cut short his words. "I expect," he continued, "that contempt will kill all love in your heart, and, at all events, this woman shall not have the trimuph she has come to seek in your tears and my heart's blood."

"Hold your tougue!" shrieked Mariquita, comprehending what he was about to say, and overwhelmed at last by the terrible situation she had brought about.

But Cuchillo no longer heard her.

"Jeanne," he said, "this woman lies. She is not my wife. She is the Duchess of Kandos, it is true, but my name is not Paul de Kandos, and I am not the duke!"

"Be silent, hush, hold your tongue!" repeated the creole, in a panting voice. She was ferocious, if one may so express it, but she was not malicious. To give a knife thrust would not have frightened her; nor to have received one. Carried away by jealousy she had thrown herself headlong and pitilessly into this contest without thinking of consequences or listening to anything but impulse. Now, she was afraid, for Cuchillo's sake, of the revelations he was going to make, and ashamed of having pushed him to this extremity, which she had never for a moment anticipated.

"It is too late, Mariquita," responded the ex-convict. "You wished to kill her, and have stricken me to the heart. I forgive you."

He once more turned towards Jeanne, but without touching her, and it was from a distance, with bowed head and on bended knees, that he resumed, in a low voice:

"Jeanne, I am the illegitimate child of a poor girl who was seduced and abandoned by the old Duke of Kandos. My name is Jean Pruneau. I have been sent to the galleys, whence I escaped. On the *Pampa*, in a frightful combat, I killed the genuine Paul de Kandos, without knowing that he was my brother. I stole his papers and his name and returned, a forger and murderer, to the house of Monsieur de Kandos. There, I knew, loved and married you. I am not, therefore, this woman's husband. She is, indeed, the duchess; or rather the marchioness, for Paul was only the marquis when he died. She is the widow of my brother, of whose death she was ignorant."

Mariquita had concealed her face in her hands, and no longer made a single movement.

Jeanne, her eyes wide open, gazed like a mad woman upon this man on his knees, her husband, who was relating this abominable odyssey to her.

"Before cursing me and driving me from you in horror," pursued the unhappy man, without raising his head or daring to lift his eyes to the creature whom he worshiped but whom he was thus crucifying, "listen to the history of my entire life. Afterwards, all will be finished. You shall never more blush for me. I will know how to be just. So, listen, without interrupting me."

At this moment the door opened, and Annette entered, without any of the persons in this drama, overcome by their emotions, hearing or perceiving the newcomer, who paused, stupefied, at sight of the strange group of distracted faces which met her eyes.

PART FIFTH, AND LAST.

BERNARD, THE STEWARD.

CHAPTER I.

LOUIS CLERMONT EARNS HIS RECREATION.

WHILE the events we have just related were taking place Louis Clermont was shut up in his own private room, having given orders that under no pretext should anyone disturb him.

We already know that he inhabited a small isolated pavillion at the lower end of the garden, which permitted of his going and coming without being observed by the domestics.

His vagabond habits would not have been long in exciting suspicion in those about him, if he had not in this manner assured his own personal independence.

Thanks to the situation of his apartment no one suspected him. He went out and returned at his ease. If he frequently arose late in the mornings, his face disfigured by the orgies of the previous night, he was supposed to have had an attack of neuralgia or to have been up late going over the duke's accounts.

This time it had not been for the purpose of a secret frolic that he had shut himself up and fastened his door against visitors, but in order to work, as he sneeringly said, "for the young people's happiness."

The reader will recollect that as a result of the revelations made by Annette to her lover, Gaston Lapierre, or rather Gaston Clermont, had consented to let himself be *made*; in a word, he had agreed to marry the duke's daughter, and gave the old convict *carte blanche* as regarded his arrangements, without himself mixing in them or appearing to know anything about them.

Clermont was enchanted at this solution, and it was to work for it with his head, or rather *hand*, at ease, that he had shut himself in his apartments, far from every eye.

"This goes on wheels ?" he said to himself, making use of his favorite expression when pleased, and rubbing his hands. "Gaston, married, is no longer a danger. Mariquita is resigned and is going to depart. Brave girl, go ! The marriage over, and the Marquesa returned to America, I will assist Cuchillo to realize his fortune, and we will divide it in brotherly fashion. That is a little operation which is very urgent and very useful." He knitted his brows. "Shall I separate from Cuchillo ? No, not just now. What would be the good ? He will still need watching. Besides, in remaining with him, I will continue to live without having to spend any of my own money, and I can increase my capital in place of having to live on it, which would, after all, be very silly." He smiled at this agreeable idea. "Well, everything goes for the best, and if an accident should happen to this poor duke, heavens! it is necessary to be prepared for everything here below. I should lose a friend, it is true, but I would have still saved a notable portion of the 'swag' and that is most important ! Now, let us to work, and lay the foundation for this smiling future !"

So saying, and after carefully closing and locking the door which communicated with the garden, and feeling himself now secure from every indiscreet eye, he sat down before a table furnished with all the materials necessary for writing, and scattered on

which were all the different official documents relative to the death of Jean Pruneau, called *Cuchillo*, and carefully examined them with the eye of an expert, before submitting them to the divers changes necessary for substituting the name of Louis Clermont wherever that of Cuchillo occurred.

This important occupation employed the whole day and part of the evening.

He commenced by washing the papers in a bath *ad hoc*, which removed all the writing, without injuring the official seals and the printed formula, in heavy black printer's ink. This done, he put the leaves in a press in order to dry them. When they were dry, seeing that the bath had whitened them too much and had slightly discolored them, he plunged them into a second bath destined to restore the color and shade previously removed. He again put them under a pressure, and when they came out, for the second time, the papers had resumed their original aspect. Nothing now remained but to fill in the blanks and reproduce the original signatures. This took but an instant. Louis Clermont was genuinely gifted in this respect, and there was no style of writing which he could not perfectly imitate, after a few hours' study. This task terminated, he contemplated his work. It was a marvel of exactitude. It was impossible to divine, or even to suspect, the fraud.

"That is it!" said he, whistling between his teeth a portion of an air he had formerly learned at the galleys. "That would deceive a mother's eye," he added, with pride. "Now, Louis Clermont is really dead: dead to all forever! There is nothing else to do but to make the ink a little paler, and to crumple and soil the paper a trifle, and to refold it in its original form. That is nothing."

He softly rubbed his hands. But he was not the man to sleep upon his laurels. He promptly made all traces of his meritorious work disappear, but, so

ungrateful is the world, he expected to receive no recompense for his services.

"It is as easy as that!" and he snapped his fingers. "In three days the banns will be published. In three weeks the 'young people' will be a stupid married couple." He paused a moment.

"What a farce life is!" He paused again, and then said:

"Now, for a frolic! I have well earned it."

It was now night. He dressed himself in a plain dark costume, and went out through the back door. It was late and he was hungry, not having dined.

He went to a *cabaret* he was acquainted with, was served with a plenteous repast, highly seasoned and accompanied by an abundance of wine, and went to "frolic" for the rest of the night.

He did not return home until morning. In spite of his fatigue he did not wish to lose the day which was commencing.

So, after changing his clothes and bathing his head in cold water, and finding that it was nine o'clock in the morning, he directed his steps towards the main building, in order to have a final conversation with the duke, and to announce that everything was arranged according to his plan.

The weather was splendid. The sun, already high in the heavens, cast its golden rays upon the grass in the little park, which had been refreshed by the night.

At the moment when Louis Clermont, become once more the steward Bernard, was about to mount the steps leading to the main door of the duke's mansion, he perceived the servants, crowded together at the entrance of the vast hall which divided the basement floor, speaking excitedly, making rapid gestures, and appearing to be much troubled and alarmed.

The old convict stopped, feeling uneasy. He was mistrustful by habit and position. When one has a past like that he dragged behind him, and when

one carries on his shoulders a present like his, everything that is unexpected, and is not capable of being at once explained, may be a threat.

"Oh! oh!" said Clermont, to himself. "What does this mean? Can any misfortune have happened?"

And, taking his resolution, he advanced towards the group, which became silent at his approach.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

MONSIEUR BERNARD occupied a peculiar position in the duke's household.

In the first place, his official duties as steward placed him greatly above the common servants. Next, it is to be remembered that Louis Clermont had been represented by Cuchillo as a former professor, whom he had met in South America, which cast upon him the reflection of education, and classed him at once as a man of learning.

And, finally, they knew that he had saved the duke's life, while he was still a marquis, and that genuine ties of intimacy and friendship united the gentleman and his steward.

Besides, Louis Clermont had ably made the most of the situation, in order to create himself a very strong and important position in his master's house; and all the servants in it treated him with great respect, and for the most part obeyed him as though he had been the duke himself.

It was, therefore, in a tone of genuine authority that Bernard, on arriving near the group of servants, asked:

"What is the matter here?"

"Ah! monsieur," cried a little maid, with a wide-awake air, who was the first to break the silence,

"monsieur le duc and madame la duchesse have disappeared."

"How, disappeared?" repeated Bernard. "What are you talking about?"

"The truth," replied the duke's confidential valet.

"The truth?"again repeated Bernard. "Say! are you mad? What means this pleasantry?"

While speakiug, he glanced interrogatively at the faces of the different servants, of both sexes, assembled about him. These faces said only too plainly that no one was joking, or had a desire to joke.

"Monsieur Bernard," resumed the oldest domestic, "this is what has passed—"

"Speak quickly!" said Clermont, a prey to serious internal agitation, all expression of which, however, he managed to restrain.

"This morning, about an hour since," pursued the lackey, "I went to the duke's room, somewhat astonished that he had not rung for me as usual.

"Marie, madame's maid, experienced the same surprise as myself, for madame, although ordinarily an early riser, had not yet rung either, but, after what happened yesterday—" The servant hesitated and stopped.

"What?" said Bernard, quickly. "Did anything extraordinary occur yesterday?"

"Oh! yes, and no; monsieur and madame appeared agitated in consequence of a visit. They did not come down to dinner. They shut themselves up in their chamber, and forbade anyone to disturb them."

Clermont felt his uneasiness increasing.

"Well, go on!"

"Well, then, when I arrived at the duke's door I knocked quietly. No answer. I supposed he was still asleep, and started to descend the stairs. But on my way down I met Marie, who was also returning—"

"Well?"

"Well, Monsieur Bernard," added the lady's-

maid, "the same thing happened to me as did to Joseph."

"What 'same thing'?"

"I knocked at madame's door, and I received no response, and I noticed how silent everything seemed."

"You should have endeavored to enter."

"That is exactly what we did," replied Joseph. "After waiting a half-hour, seeing that neither monsieur nor madame rang, called or appeared, we went up-stairs again. I turned the knob of the door, but expected to find it locked on the inside. It was not!—"

"Ah!"

"I entered and hastened through the duke's apartments—they were empty!"

"Perhaps he went out early, for a ride in the *bois*," said Clermont, who felt himself turning pale.

"No, sir. The horses are all in the stable, and the porter would have seen monsieur le duc pass out."

"That is true!"

"It is the same with madame," quickly added Marie. "For her apartments, like the duke's, were also unlocked, and equally empty. And, besides, the beds have not been touched. Neither monsieur nor madame slept in them last night, and no one knows when they went away——"

"But Mademoiselle de Kandos?" suddenly exclaimed Clermont. "Where is she?"

"Oh! mademoiselle went out yesterday evening—"

"Went out! Well?"

"And has not returned!"

"She has not returned?" murmured Bernard, who could no longer doubt that something terrible must have occurred, and he trembled at the idea of possible catastrophes, and future dangers.

"No," replied the porter, who had just joined the assemblage, and had heard the last words.

"Was she alone?" again asked Clermont, almost mechanically.

"No, sir: a lady accompanied her."

"A lady! What lady?"

"I did not know her, she had arrived during the day—"

"And," added Marie, "she was unwilling to give her name, but asked for madame la duchesse."

"What was this lady like?"

"Tall, very beautiful, very dark and dressed in black. And eyes—Oh! I never saw such eyes! and she had a foreign accent."

"Mariquita!" thought Clermont, filled with terror. "We are lost! Oh! the she-devil. She has deceived me. She has done some great evil!"

He was afraid, and felt ready to lose his head. But the old scamp had nerves of steel.

"No nonsense!" he said to himself. "I must first see my way clear, and know the facts."

He straightened himself up, and, by a violent effort of will, recovered his presence of mind.

"Very well," he resumed aloud; "let us see, in the first place, if the duke has written nothing, left nothing, to explain this sudden departure. He smiled, and then continued: "You scared me for a moment. I almost believed some crime had been committed—but you are sure—"

"Oh! as to that, yes," cried several voices.

"Nothing has been disturbed—"

"Everything is in its place—"

"And besides, we would have heard if—"

"That is evident!" said the old convict. "Everything will explain itself, presently, I have no doubt."

With a gesture he scattered the group which had occupied the hall and stopped his passage.

"I will go up-stairs," said he. "Remain here, and above all, let no one disturb anything! I know the duke's habits." He paused for breath, and added. "I think I know what it is—"

"If you had not come, and if no one had returned

soon," said Joseph, "I had almost made up my mind to go and alarm the police—"

"And why do that?" exclaimed Clermont, in a terrible voice.

"Why! Monsieur Bernard—I did not know—but that some misfortune had happened to the duke, or to the duchess—but as you are here—"

"Yes, yes, I am here," resumed Bernard, subduing his passion. "This is my affair. I forbid you to stir—I am going to look around up-stairs. I know what it all means—"

The domestics looked at him with astonishment.

"Or, at least, I believe I divine it—I am going up—to see for myself. There is nothing to be uneasy about."

Clermont was greatly agitated while speaking. He moved suddenly forward, and mounted to the first floor.

"Alarm the police!" he thought, while ascending the stairs. "Wake them up! The idiots! It lacked nothing but that! Here we are in a pretty mess! What can the *Marquesa* have done? For it is she! She has tricked me! But, she shall pay for it, if I catch hold of her again! But, where are they? This milk-sop of a Cuchillo has lost his head—Where can he have gone? And the little duchess? And Annette? Flown with Mariquita—But, then, she must know all! God's thunder!"

He paused at the head of the stairs. Now, he was alone. He breathed hard, and, with his handkerchief mopped the sweat off his forehead.

"It is to be hoped that the animal hasn't committed suicide. He is capable of it, he is such a cowardly fool! He has remorse—and scruples. The idiot! If he has, I shall be ruined!" He entered the duke's study, which was next his bed-room.

"And if the duchess should speak, for she, also, must know the truth, my ruin is certain! I wonder how she took it? Badly, most assuredly!" Again he paused for a second. "I almost feel like running

away, myself." He hesitated, and then furiously shook his head and shoulders. "But, no, my good fellow! One does not throw the handle after the hatchet—so quick as that! Am I going to show the white feather, in my turn? To fly would be to lose all—and, perhaps, I may be able to save all. Courage! with a little coolness and presumption, who knows? Let us wait a little and look around a bit, before committing any nonsense, or playing any fool tricks!"

Then he closed the study door, and commenced to look about him.

CHAPTER III.

LOUIS CLERMONT IS EQUAL TO THE OCCASION.

ON first sight the study, as had been said by Joseph, the duke's confidential valet, presented nothing abnormal. Nothing indicated, in fact, that there had here been a struggle or violence of any kind. On the writing desk, towards which Clermont at once directed his steps, there were some newspapers and letters received during the day. There was nothing extraordinary about these of a nature to reveal the cause of this sudden departure.

Clermont ran over the letters and opened and shook the papers, with the hope, or, rather, the desire of finding a word from his accomplice, which might forewarn and forearm him, or at least, of discovering some evidence of what had taken place. All in vain. The old convict was about to leave, much disappointed and discouraged, when he suddenly perceived a drawer not completely closed. He knew this drawer. It was a secret one, in which he knew that Cuchillo was in the habit of placing his private papers and a revolver. He opened the drawer. It was empty!

"Oh! oh!" said Clermont. "There was nothing here but his papers and the weapon. He has taken away, or destroyed the papers, and has carried off the pistol. This is serious."

He clasped his hands together with rage; but he was not a man to lose time in thought, when he felt himself on the scent. He then turned towards the fire-place, before which there was a fire-board; he thrust the latter aside and perceived some cinders of such a character as to denote that numerous sheets of paper had been burnt there.

"Ah! ah!" said he again. "Here is an indication. Why did he destroy these? And what did they contain?"

He kneeled down and felt in the cinders, with the hope that the destruction had not been complete and that he might perhaps find some scraps of writing. But the flames had performed their office well.

He was about to arise when he perceived, thanks to his stooping position, a revolver thrown under a sofa. He eagerly seized it. It was loaded and cocked. It had been thrown some distance, evidently. It was certainly extraordinary that the shock had not discharged it.

"Why did he load it?" the convict asked himself. "And, then, why did he throw it away?" He reflected. "Was he disarmed by violence? No. There would have been some trace of a struggle, and, decidedly, there is none."

He concealed the revolver in his pocket, arose, and, very pale, directed his steps towards the duke's bed-chamber, which communicated with the study by a door opposite the fireplace.

The bed-chamber was yet quieter then the study. It was evident that Cuchillo had not been there since the day previous. The bed had not been touched. Louis Clermont nevertheless examined the room in the most minute fashion. He found in their places all those ordinary, useful articles which one necessarily carries with one when about to ab-

sent one's self for some time. The keys of all the different pieces of furniture were left in their locks. Everything, as we have said, was in its proper place. He even observed that the duke had carried away none of his clothes. If he had gone away, he must have gone in the clothes he was wearing at the time.

"Mariquita is mixed up in this," he grumbled between his teeth in a threatening manner. "I wonder what exactly occurred?" He had finished examining the duke's private apartment. "Now, let us see the duchess's," he continued to himself. "A woman does not run away in this manner without leaving behind her some trace of how she last occupied herself."

Saying this, he left the bed-room, went out into the hall, crossed it and entered the duchess's room.

The same sight met his eyes as in the duke's. Nothing was disturbed. The small, private *salon*, in which we assisted at the last interview between Gaston and Annette, and in which Jeanne was in the habit of spending most of her time, offered nothing suspicious and revealed nothing.

Still, Clermont noticed a disordered and rumpled pillow which looked as if some one's face had been pressed against it. He approached it, contemplated it, felt of it, turned it over and found under it a handkerchief belonging to the duchess. This handkerchief was also rumpled; and it had little holes in it, as if some one had bitten it. Moreover, it had the aspect of linen which had been recently wet.

"She was weeping!" said our acute old scamp, and she tried to stifle her sobs by chewing her handkerchief. That looks bad, very bad!"

He then went into the bed-room. Neither had her bed been slept in. A wardrobe only was open. It contained Jeanne's clothes. Nothing was missing save her plainest and least expensive mantle. That alone was gone.

Clermont, more and more agitated, returned to the bondoir and went up to the little secretaire which

Jeanne had owned before her marriage. She was very fond of it. The key of it was in the lock. He opened it. Many of the drawers contained money. The duchess had left all as it was. This appeared stranger than all the rest to the old convict. But some of the other drawers, which had evidently contained papers, were empty.

"Has she burnt hers also?" he asked himself; and he inspected the fire-place, as he had done in Cuchillo's study. Here, there were no cinders.

"She has destroyed nothing," was his conclusion. "She has carried them with her."

This long domiciliary visit each minute increased the ex-convict's distraction.

"This looks bad," he repeated between his teeth, with a fierce look. "Mariquita! I cannot doubt but that this foreigner was she!"

He left the first floor, and went up to Annette's apartments on the second. He found nothing here that could throw any light on the subject. The young girl had put on a cloak and hat in order to go out with the unknown visitor of yesterday.

Clermont let himself fall into a chair.

"What appears plain," he finally said to himself, "is that the *Marquesa* has been here. She has spoken and revealed all. Annette has gone with her. That is because she has learned that this woman is her mother—. But she could not have learned that without learning all the rest! This is fine! I had fixed everything, so she could marry my son, which would have closed her mouth forever. A thousand thunders! If she knows that Cuchillo is her father's (the real Paul de Kandos) murderer—Whew! how my flesh creeps! Now, what has become of Cuchillo? Has he gone to rejoin the *Marquesa*?" He remained silent a moment. "And the duchess?" he continued. "Where is she? Why has she fled like the others? Has she pursued her husband? Or, on the contrary, has she accompanied him, and have they gone away together? I am *d——d* if I understand anything

about it! It is disgusting! To have worked so well, just to see everything go to pieces! If we had only realized and divided I would at least have my little hoard—. I would fly also, and evil to him who would catch me!" He arose, and clasped his fingers nervously. "But I haven't a cent! Thinking this would last—I have tippled away, day by day, whatever came to me. I have slidden along nicely! And not a radish for the future——unless I find Cuchillo again! Provided the brute has not killed himself. In any case, I cannot remain here. The police would have already been here if anyone had said a word. Thus far they held their tongues—. Then, nothing is lost—if I regain the upper hand!— Then here are some who will remain silent and some who will sing!" he added, with a sinister laugh.

For about ten minutes he promenaded up and down Annette's chamber, where he had remained.

"In the first place," he finally resumed, "it is necessary to prevent this from becoming known, and to calm the uneasiness and suspicion of the servants. Then, I must find Mariquita again. She cannot be very far off: but there is no time to lose. It is through her that I will reach the others, now. Ah! the jade! She shall pay me for this! She can't play with this old cock! I have been too good to her. That shall never happen again."

A quarter of an hour later he descended to the drawing-room on the ground floor with a perfectly calm air. He collected the servants together there and read them a letter, which he had written himself, purporting to be signed by Paul de Kandos, and which he pretended to have found in a drawer in the duke's study, in which the duke said that "being obliged to depart hastily, with his wife, on urgent business, he left, for some days, the custody and direction of the house in his, Bernard's hands." By this letter he also "begged his excellent steward to have some clothing as well as the duchess's, sent to

him at the *Chateau de Kandos* where they would sojourn for a short time."

This was a trifle improbable, but Clermont had not just then a choice of means, and he knew so well how to play his *role* that he partly deceived the domestics and they dared make no open comments.

Clermont indicated very minutely what should be placed in the trunk, gave very precise and detailed orders, and announced that he was going out to fulfill some other orders of the duke, but that he would return at an early hour.

"Here are several days gained," he said to himself. "Things must remain as they are, until I know exactly what threatens me. Now, I am off to the Marquesa's."

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK AND WHITE DIPLOMACY.

CLERMONT jumped into the first carriage he saw, and was rapidly driven to Cuvier Street.

Arrived there, without addressing the porter, he passed rapidly into the house, and, mounting the stairs, stopped all out of breath before the creole's door. According to his ideas everything at Mariquita's should have been silent. His astonishment was, therefore, extreme, when he heard the sound, in no wise concealed, of a hammer, at times mingled with the noise of heavy steps, proceeding from some person who never dreamt of concealing his presence.

"Oh! oh!" said Clermont internally and with great satisfaction. "They cannot decline to open the door on the ground that no one is at home." And he rang the bell. But at that the noise of the hammer was resumed and overpowered that of the bell. Clermont had to ring twice more. The last time he pulled the handle with such force that the *ting-a-ling-a-ling!* of the bell was louder than the blows of the hammer. The latter immediately ceased, Clermont heard the heavy steps approaching, and the door was opened.

The visitor found himself face to face with Mono, who looked at him with a frank air, and as if he had been expecting him. He even stood to one side to permit the duke's steward to enter the apartment.

"Well, this goes better than I could have hoped," thought Clermont. "Good-day, my friend," he said in his most conciliating voice, closing and fastening the door behind him, without the negro's appearing

inclined to oppose it, or, apparently, even thinking it extraordinary.

"Good day, massa!" replied Mono, with that thickness of pronunciation and stupid air which he had assumed before the police commissioner the evening when he had gone on the roofs in pursuit of the assassin of old Vigot, *alias Coco, the Death's Head.*

"I would like to speak with your mistress," resumed Clermont; "Madame de Los Rios."

"Mistress no here," replied Mono.

"Has she gone out?"

"Yes."

"But she will return presently? I will wait for her."

"No use."

"How is that, since she will return?"

"Mistress no return."

"See here, my good fellow, you needn't tell that to me. I am an old friend of your mistress. It isn't necessary to treat me like a stranger, or an intruder, to whom madame's door is forbidden."

"Yes, me know. You friend to my mistress—you called Bernard, duke's steward."

"The same. Well?"

"Mistress very sorry no see you befo' she go 'way, massa; but she in hurry, great hurry, boat waitin' fur her."

"What boat?" said Clermont, very uneasy and mistrustful.

"Boat at Havre, fur America."

"See here, my friend, let us be plain and try and understand each other. Then he said to himself, trying to not show his distrust and uneasiness: "This animal is playing stupid!" But he immediately resumed aloud: "You first tell me that your mistress has gone out, and then you say that she has departed."

"Yes, gone out, depart fur Havre."

"She is at Havre?"

"Fur to take boat, and go back to America."

"When did she leave?"

"Yes'day evenin'."

"That is not true! You lie!" said Clermont, beside himself.

"Me no lie! nebber lie, nebber!"

"If she had gone she would not have left here all alone."

"We meet her at Havre berry soon."

Clermont almost foamed at the mouth. Suddenly he pushed the negro aside and rushed into the dining-room, where he had been two days before when he had come to see Mariquita. The room was encumbered with trunks—closed this time—and strongly fastened boxes. But there was no one there. Clermont went on, and entered the *salon.* It offered the same appearance of disorder as had the dining-room.

A heavy hammer on a chair, and some nails scattered on the floor, indicated that Mono had been interrupted just as he was finishing fastening the boxes.

Clermont gained the boudoir, then the bed-chamber; in fact, he went through all the apartments. They were perfectly empty. Neither Mariquita nor the little half-breed was to be found.

He returned to the salon, where Mono, kneeling on the floor, was with vigorous blows driving the last nails into the boxes.

This work so absorbed him that he did not hear Clermont, who had spoken to him two or three times without getting any response, until the old convict took him by the shoulders and shook him in order to attract his attention.

"So," said Clermont, "Madame de Los Rios is at Havre?"

"Yes, massa."

"Alone?"

"No."

"With whom?"

"Carmencita."

"Who is Carmencita?"

"The half-breed, the *China*, mistress's maid."

"Why are you not with her?"

"Me stay to pack up and see to the baggage. Misstress no like all this with her."

"And you are going to rejoin her?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When eberyt'ing is packed up."

"But she will be on her way to America by that time."

"Not yet. Boat don't sail fur three days. Me get there plenty time 'nough."

Clermont was exasperated.

"See here," said he, assuming a caressing tone, "answer me sincerely."

"Me tell all to massa."

"Yesterday evening when your mistress returned didn't a young girl accompany her?"

"No," said Mono, "mistress alone. But no alone when she go away."

"Ah!"

"Carmincita go with her."

Clermont clasped his fingers together. Still he managed to restrain himself, and, quickly drawing a bank note from his pocket-book, he showed it to Mono.

"Know what that is?"

"Money," said the negro, showing all his white teeth.

"A hundred francs, my friend; that's what it is. They are yours, if you wish."

Mono stretched out his enormous hand, but Clermont drew back his.

"You must earn them," said he.

"How?"

"By telling me the real truth."

"Me have tole truth." And he still held out his hand.

"Then Madame de Los Rios is really at Havre?"

"Yes."

"And if I go by the railway to-day I will find her there?"

"Yes, massa."

"You are sure of it?"

"Sure, yes. Mistress say: 'Old friend promise to come and meet me.'"

"Ah! she said that? Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Me believe massa knew."

Clermont remained silent a moment.

"Massa satisfied?" resumed Mono, once more holding out his hand for the bank-note.

"Very well, indeed, my good friend," responded Clermont. He replaced the note in his pocket-book and the latter in his pocket. The negro made a grimace of dissatisfaction. "I am going to join your mistress, and I will give you this money at Havre."

"For true?"

"On my word of honor!"

Mono's face expanded into smiles.

"We will meet again soon!" said Clermont, and he left the negro to finish his work.

"He lies!" said Clermont to himself in a fit of exasperation, as he descended the stairs. "He lies! They wish to send me to Havre to get me out of the way, and to profit by my absence in order to carry off their baggage without my knowing to what place. But I am as sharp as this devilish negro, who thinks to deceive *me* by imitating the speech of stage niggers!"

"It appears that Madame de Los Rios has departed for Havre," said he, entering the porter's lodge.

"Yes, sir," answered the old woman, who was the only occupant of the lodge, in a manner which left no doubt as to her good faith.

"Alone?"

"Oh! no: her little maid accompanied her."

"And no one else?"

"No," said the woman, astonished.

"Oh! I only asked because I knew she was to

have been accompanied by a young lady who was with her yesterday evening when she returned here before her final departure."

"Madame returned entirely alone, as usual."

"Then the young lady must have waited for her at the railway station. Well, I will rejoin them at Havre, as I have several important commissions to give Madame for America. Thank you very much, Madame." And Clermont left the house.

"Where the devil can she have put Annette?" he asked himself in a rage. "They were, they *are* together, since Mademoiselle de Kandos followed her when she left Neuilly yesterday evening. Ah! they wish to play it too fine on the old man! Well, we shall see! He laughs best who laughs last!" He assumed his cynical and threatening smile. "She is a sly one, is Mariquita. But I am an old fox. And no chicken can entice me to my ruin, not even she!" While reflecting he hastened along, and while he hastened along he reflected: "They wish to send me to Havre. Then it is unnecessary for me to go there," he pursued, mechanically. "But I must appear to go. The porter at the lodge will be questioned and will repeat my words. That is not sufficient: they will perhaps keep a watch on me. Well, let us go to the Saint-Lazare station and find out the hours for the departure of trains for Havre, and have the air of intending to go there."

Having come to this conclusion he directed his steps towards Saint-Lazare street. He had enough time before him, and the walk did him good in calming, by fatigue, the exasperation of his nerves.

"Ah!" he all at once thought, after a half-hour's walking, "I have it! Annette is in love. She would carry the news to my son. That is certain. There is the quarter in which I can learn the trnth and recover the trace."

And he entered the Saint-Lazare station, where, with much ostentation, he informed himself as to the hours of departure for Havre.

CHAPTER V.

NO CHANCE!

THIS information secured, Clermont left the station and entered a carriage, saying to the coachman:

"I engage you by the hour!"

"Where shall I take monsieur first?" asked the automaton.

"Straight ahead!" replied Clermont, who was in reality very much perplexed. His first impulse had been to go directly to his wife and question her. "I can frighten her, at need, if she resist," he continued to himself; "and I can surely force her to speak in case she knows anything."

This was simple, but brutal. Only, like all that which is too simple, this way was not, perhaps, as efficacious as the ex-convict had at first thought.

In the first place Madame Lapierre might not yet know of the duke's departure.

On the other hand, if he did not obtain an immediate and categorical answer, this step might put his wife on her guard and he would lose all the advantage of a first surprise.

In the second place, by going immediately to Madame Lapierre's he was almost certain, at that hour, to meet his son there.

Now, the old convict experienced, at sight of Gaston, a very singular feeling, a mixture of fear and respect; and he did not like to meet him.

"I would much prefer a little private *tête-à-tête*," he said to himself, with his wicked smile. "I know the fellow. *He* would tell me nothing, and would

prevent his mother from speaking. Therefore, it will be better to wait till he is out of the house. There is no danger in going there," he concluded. "The danger I most fear, that of denunciation to the authorities, does not appear probable; at least, not just yet."

He passed his nervous fingers through his rough gray hair.

"Who would denounce me? Certainly not Cuchillo. He has run away and is in hiding. He is afraid of Mariquita; at least he has not rejoined her. The little duchess will not speak, either, wherever she may be or whatever else she may do! One does not denounce one's husband. She adores him—and even in my case, when did *my* wife ever denounce me? There are, then, Annette and the *Marquesa.* Annette might, perhaps, give way to a feeling of anger, to avenge her father—but, since she is with Mariquita, who, after all, is her mother, she will do nothing without the advice and consent of the latter."

Mariquita was the black spot.

Still, on thinking over the situation, Clermont began to feel more and more re-assured.

"After all," said he, "what is Mariquita's interest? It is not in denouncing Cuchillo! She may have threatened him, but that is all! She could only wish for two things: her fortune and her lover, if she still cares for him!"

He gave a shudder.

"In reality," he murmured, "by denouncing Cuchillo and in giving him up to justice she would come into possession of the inheritance of Paul de Kandos, of whom she and Annette are the legal heirs. Whew!" His shuddering increased. "Still, she had a great weakness for him. And to send him to the scaffold—. No, that is certainly impossible. I know her. She has a devil of a sight of vanity, like all women. The little duchess is pretty, and Cuchillo loves her. Mariquita must have

wished, still wishes, above all, to separate him from his wife, to regain possession of him, and to revenge herself on the false duchess by stealing away her husband. This is her plan, or I greatly deceive myself." Clermont felt still further reassured. "The danger, therefore, is not immediate. It would not exist nor become serious if Cuchillo had not acted the fool, resisted her and refused to resume their former relations. Then, she would only listen to her hatred and jealousy, and would very naturally have his head cut off; unless she kills him and his wife herself, which would seem perfectly proper in my eyes if it did not ruin me. For, from the day on which she lays hands on the money, no more dividing. I am robbed, despoiled, as if by highwaymen in a forest. She has no reason for treating me tenderly. And, since she flies from me and conceals herself, it is because she wishes to play with me. Ah! but no!" he exclaimed, assuming his most ferocious look and threatening smile, "none of that, you jade! The old man will put a stop to that little game! My beautiful child, you must not play with Louis Clermont, nor deride him, nor meddle with his little interests, or, if you do, woe be to you! You possess my secrets, you have thrown yourself across my path. You threaten me. You have made me grow a little grayer since this morning. All this you shall pay for. You are in the way, *Marquesa* of the devil, and I shall not leave a hair of Cuchillo's head in your clutches. He belongs to me, to me alone." He remained thoughtful for a moment. "To find her again is the main thing. Let us hope that when she is disposed of this affair will be ended and that I may at last be able to enjoy a little repose. Coachman!" called he, through the window, "to Neuilly!"

He had determined on his plan of action. First, he must know if anything had happened at Neuilly. Perhaps he might find some news there, or a letter awaiting him from Cuchillo. In any case he must

overlook the domestics, and prevent them from gossipping in the neighborhood; and make them believe in the lie he had invented that morning. This done, he would return after dark to Cuvier street, and assure himself that Mono was still there with Mariquita's baggage. Then, he would go to *Trois-Couronnes* street to take a survey of his wife's house, and see what was going on there. He would enter and have a talk with Ernestine, regulating himself according to circumstances, and the inspiration of the moment. Ah! if he could only divide himself into three persons, and so be able to act, in all three of the places in which his peace and safety were concerned, at one and the same time.

At Neuilly, he found nothing. No news, no letters. The duchess's waiting-maid and the duke's valet had prepared the two trunks of clothes according to his orders. He had them addressed to the old family *chateau* in Franche-Comte, and sent them to the railway; then he was served with his dinner, and, night coming on, retired to his pavilion, so that the servants, believing him about the house, would not dare to go out or to neglect their duties.

Once in his own rooms, he changed his clothes, putting on a dark suit, took a revolver, which, along with a knife, he placed in a side pocket of his overcoat, and then left the place by way of the little back gate while the entire household believed him peaceably in bed for the night.

Then, gaining the nearest carriage stand, he entered a hack and was driven to Cuvier street, where he got out of the carriage at some distance from the house in which Mariquita had resided. He walked rapidly up to the latter and entered the janitor's office.

"Beg pardon, madame," said he to the old woman he had seen before, "I missed the train I had counted on taking for Havre this afternoon, and have come back to say a word to Madame de Los Rios's negro servant. Is he still above stairs?"

"But he has gone, sir," replied the woman.

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir; an hour after you left a wagon came for the baggage."

"Gone with the baggage," repeated Clermont in despair. "And where?"

"To the railway station. Here are the keys of the apartments."

Clermont made but one bound from the house to the street, and another from the street into the hack.

"Saint-Lazare station!" cried he to the coachman. "And at a gallop!"

At the station he assured himself in a very few minutes that neither Mono nor his mistress's baggage had ever been there.

"Thunder! I am doubled up!" exclaimed he, literally foaming at the mouth.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED RENCOUNTER.

DECIDEDLY, Louis Clermont began to experience a most marked nervousness. Now, some half-dozen people might be, or actually were, in the secret which he had believed so well buried (he recalled at what a bloody price) between Cuchillo and himself.

Besides being in great danger, he saw himself *played with*, and it was this, perhaps, which caused him the most anger. Each one, here below, has his pretensions and his "particular vanity," as Artemus Ward has it. Now, the old convict's pretension was to play with (*i. e.* make a fool of) other people, and his vanity consisted in believing himself to be sharper than the rest of the world.

Under the influence of these two sentiments, fear and humiliation, he commenced to lose a little of his usual and wonderful coolness. He now began to feel that his hours and minutes were numbered.

If Mariquita had found herself face to face with the duchess and Annette, there must have been a terrible explosion. And the proof of this was that Cuchillo and his wife had fled; and Annette had gone away with the *Marquesa*.

Under the circumstances, in a situation as frightfully strained as he well guessed this one was, everything was to be feared. Nevertheless, there remained but one step for him to take. This was in the direction of his wife and of his son. So he ordered the coachman to drive toward *Trois-Couronnes* street.

Arrived at a short distance from the house in

which his wife lived, he descended from the carriage, which he sent away.

Walking slowly, his hands in his pockets and his nose in the air, like a respectable citizen promenading after dinner, he made his way towards the house occupied by "his family."

"Is Monsieur Gaston Lapierre at home?" he asked of the lame old janitor, whose acquaintance we made at the beginning of this narrative.

"No, sir; he has gone out."

"Ah! that is vexatious! Do you think he will return soon?"

"I do not know. He said nothing to me about it."

"Has Madame Lapierre gone out, also?"

"Madame Lapierre? No, she is at home."

"Then I will go up and see her—"

"You know the right floor?"

"The fourth, I believe."

"Yes; the door at the head of the stairs. Besides, there is a brass plate on the door."

"Ah! very good. Thanks!" And Louis Clermont quickly ascended the stairs.

Arrived at the proper door, he rang three times before anyone came to open it for him. Finally he heard a hesitating step, and a voice, which he recognized as Ernestine's, asked:

"Who is there?"

"A dispatch for Monsieur Gaston Lapierre," answered the ex-gaucho, in a disguised voice.

The door was quickly opened. Not less quickly did he throw himself inside of it, pushing against his surprised and frightened wife, and close it behind him.

On recognizing her husband, and doubly terrified by the roughness of his entrance, Madame Lapierre started to utter a cry, but Clermont placed his hand over her mouth, and said to her in a low but threatening voice:

"Be silent! I wish you to keep quiet!"

She made a struggle to get loose. He seized her roughly by the arm, his fingers sinking into and bruising the flesh, as he placed his own flashing eyes near the terrified ones of the unhappy woman.

"No airs!" he said. "March straight ahead, or—"

This was so clear that Madame Lapierre turned pale.

"He is going to kill me!" she thought.

"I see that you understand. That is right!" he sneeringly continued. "Go on directly and submissively! I engage that you will. I am not in a humor to be trifled with!"

Then, tearing from her trembling hand the candle it held, he pushed his wife before him, and in this manner they entered the shop. It was now empty.

Arrived here, he paused, and, holding the light before his wife's face, closely regarded her agitated features.

"What do you wish with me?" she murmured.

"You shall soon know!" He was still looking at her very attentively, and appeared satisfied with his examination. Madame Lapierre's eyelids were red and swollen, as if she had been weeping plentifully and for a long time, and under the excitement caused by her husband's presence and actions, one could easily distinguish the traces of a previous emotion.

"Good," thought he. "She knows all, or, at least, something."

He placed the light on the large table which occupied the middle of the room.

"Monsieur," said she, in a choking voice, but which had recovered some energy. "I have forbidden you ever placing your feet in my house!"

"Ernestine," replied he, with an accent which made her flesh creep, "you ought to know that I do not like to *fool away my time* uselessly. Let us tell a few stories, and tell them well. Where is the duke?

Where is the duchess? Where is Mademoiselle de Kandos?"

She shuddered; but did not appear astonished at the questions, and Clermont immediately drew his conclusions. Then, she recovered herself, and looked him straight in the face, like a woman who has taken a resolution.

"I know nothing of them!" said she.

"My dove," he replied, "don't lie! I am in a hurry."

"I have nothing to say."

"We will see about that!" and he seized her by the wrists. "Ernestine, I have an idea that you will come to your death by my hands."

"I expect it!"

"You——and your son!"

"Wretch!"

"No pet names, if you please!"

There was a short silence. Pale but resolute she looked him in the face, while the iron fingers of the scoundrel squeezed her arms, bruising the flesh, making the veins stand out till she believed they were going to burst, and causing her very joints to crack.

"You torture me!" said she, in a stifled voice, and almost ready to faint.

"Answer me then, madame; for I can read on your face and in your eyes that you know that which has brought me here. The duke and duchess have disappeared, as well as your son's dear little friend! Can you deny that you know it?"

"I—know—it—"

She commenced to writhe with pain under the close grip of the ex-convict; yet she made superhuman efforts not to scream out.

"Where are they?"

"I know nothing. Oh! the coward! Let me go. I am going—to call for help!"

"Do you wish to send me to the scaffold? Think of your son!"

She had now fallen on her knees, her face covered with perspiration, panting for breath, sighing, agitated by convulsive twitchings of her limbs, and almost ready to faint.

Fearing that she might lose consciousness, he slightly loosened his hold, without, however, altogether abandoning his victim.

"You shall speak," he resumed, with his cynical sneer, "or you shall die!"

"I will not speak," said she. "I do not know where they are. I only know that they have gone away."

"How do you know it?"

She remained silent. He again tightened his grip on her swollen and discolored wrists, and with such violence that she cried out. He threw her backwards on the floor, and placed his knee on her breast.

"Keep quiet, or I strangle you!"

"Coward! infamous wretch!" murmured she, restraining her voice, thinking of her son, ready to die, and determined to die silently, rather than dishonor him by betraying her husband, who was his father.

"Where are they?" repeated the convict.

"I tell you—that I do not know; and if I did, I would die rather than tell you."

"Why?"

"Because Gaston, my son, would not have me tell you, as you very well know."

Madame Lapierre was evidently sincere. Clermont comprehended it. He arose, and raised her with him.

The poor woman could not stand. She was about to fall back on the floor when he pushed her into a chair, into which she let herself fall, her arms hanging at her sides, almost paralyzed from pain, and the arrested circulation of the blood.

"Ernestine," he resumed more slowly, with concentrated rage, "you shall pay for this, and so

shall he, your son. He is my enemy. *Carajo!* You must know how I treat those who annoy me or threaten my safety!"

He ground his teeth, and with a sneer, continued: "I wished his happiness. I was going to marry him to his sweetheart, and, without my help, he could never have married her! My head is threatened, and the scaffold for me means the scaffold for the duke, shame for Annette, and for you two. You will become objects of horror. People will chase you in the streets, point to you with fingers of scorn and cover you with filth. I, alone, can prevent this, and here I am disarmed!"

He uttered a terrible oath, and turned on his silent and motionless wife.

"Ah! you know nothing," he resumed. "Well, *he* knows! I will wait for him. And we will have an explanation with each other!"

Madame Lapierre shivered from head to foot. An encounter between these two men, father and son, was the very thing in all the world she most dreaded.

"Monsieur," said she, "however infamous one may be one does not do evil simply because it is evil! Gaston does not know, any more than I do, that which you have demanded of me. He cannot tell you, therefore, what you wish to learn, any better than I can. Do with me what you will. Kill me, if my blood can save him, if it is enough to assuage your ferocity—and your hatred. But, do not touch him. Stay, do you wish me to write out, now, with my own hand, that I have killed myself? He would weep for me. But—you will respect him, your son—and leave him his life, as sad as it may be, and the little honor and consideration I have been able to gain for him—in spite of you."

Clermont shrugged his shoulders. All this did not in the least interest him. The wild beast, which was now in possession of him, exasperated by circumstances, thirsted for crime, and if he did not

give way to his desire it was simply because he had not yet lost all hope.

All at once some one rang the door-bell.

Madame Lapierre recovered herself as if under the influence of an electric shock.

"Who can it be?" thought she. "And this man here!"

Clermont had become motionless. A second ring was heard.

"Is this my son?" said he.

"No. He has a key."

"Who are you expecting?"

"No one. I will not answer the bell!"

"You must."

"Why?"

"Because I have been seen to enter here—and it might give rise to suspicions."

"But—"

"No 'buts', in the name of God! Do what I tell you," and he took her by the arm and led her towards the door.

"Ask who it is!" he whispered in her ear.

"Who is there?" said she feebly.

"Open, I beg you!" answered a woman's voice.

Louis Clermont gave a sudden start.

"The duchess!" he murmured. "I recognize her voice. Well! there *is* a Providence!" He drew his poniard, and held it before his wife's eyes. "I am going to hide behind the door," said he, in a low tone. "Open it, and be silent! Or I will cut both your throats as if you were a couple of chickens. You hear me?"

He stepped back a few paces so as to be hidden by the door when it was open. Madame Lapierre, half dead with fright, and not daring to resist, for she knew he was capable of doing what he had threatened, opened the door with a trembling hand.

Clermont had not been deceived. It was indeed the duchess, dressed from head to foot in black, and

her face covered with a thick veil which concealed her features.

"You, madame," said Ernestine, recoiling, not knowing what she ought to do, and almost ready to cry out: "Fly, for your life!"

"Yes, I wish to speak with you. I beg you to hear me!" replied Jeanne, in a broken voice. "Are you alone?"

"Yes," replied the convict's wife, in an almost inaudible voice, without re-closing the door, so that her husband, flattened against the wall, knife in hand and concealed by the darkness, might not be seen.

She directed her steps towards the room which served as her shop, and was the first room one entered.

As soon as the two women had left, Clermont noiselessly closed the door leading to the stairs, and, taking off his shoes, advanced with the step of a wolf and placed his ear to the door of the room where they were, which had been closed by Madame Lapierre immediately after the duchess had entered.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

BUT, before going any farther, it is time for us to relate what had occurred among the other personages of our drama since we last saw them.

The reader will remember that we left Cuchillo at the moment when he was about to make his confession to his wife in the presence of Mariquita and of Mademoiselle de Kandos, the latter having entered the *salon* without anyone having perceived her.

The situation was tragic. Cuchillo deeply loved Jeanne. This love, the contact with this good and pure, as well as beautiful, creature, had little by little converted him and brought him to a better life, or, had reawakened in him the generous sentiments which slept at the bottom of his heart, and which a long life of shame, among men of blood and vice, had not been able to completely extinguish.

Weak of character, strong of passion and superior to the position which chance had given him in life, he had succumbed to temptations with a sort of fatality and had committed crimes which begat themselves, by the logic of descent, without possessing either the heart or the temperament of a criminal.

Since he had loved Jeanne and since the comparative calmness of his life had left him some repose, a horror of his past and present had taken possession of him.

The idea that he was deceiving this adorable creature who was his wife; that it was another whom she loved in him, and that she would drive him away with contempt and disgust if she but knew his

real personality, burned him like those caustics which devour what they touch.

This was an intolerable suffering. Often had his frightful secret trembled on his lips. Often had he been on the point of telling Jeanne all, and of asking her forgiveness and mercy!

And if he had been silent, it had been from pity for her; saying to himself that her happiness was his first duty, his only way of redeeming what could be redeemed of the odiousness of his past conduct.

When he saw that Mariquita was going to tear him from the duchess, and that nothing could prevent this catastrophe, he no longer hesitated.

"She will despise me," he said to himself, "and she will feel it less."

It was amidst a deep silence that he commeneed the detailed recital of his life.

Mariquita, overcome by the situation, ashamed of the evil she had done, without looking forward to consequences, in despair at seeing how much he loved another and how far off from his heart she herself would henceforth be, listened to him with lowered head, pale and trembling, and no longer knowing why she had come there, so overcome was she by a suffering which was hitherto unknown to her. She no longer recognized herself. Who would have supposed that she could see such a rival before her, and that in place of striking the latter down with her poniard she would pity the man who had preferred another to herself?

As to Jeanne, motionless, her eyes wide open, she stood like a statue looking at her husband.

He no longer saw anything. He spoke, or rather his conscience did. It was like the confession of one who was dying.

At the moment when he related how he had killed Paul de Kandos, in order to avenge Mariquita; how this duel, which he believed a fair one, had become a murder, an assassination, through the calculation and intervention of Louis Clermont; and how, in

falling, Paul de Kandos had thrown in his face the terrible word: "Assassin!" a slight figure suddenly stood up before him, with raised arm, the hand pointing towards him and a voice repeated:

"Assassin! Assassin! Assassin!"

It was Annette. Annette, who had heard all, and who, her face distorted and her eyes flashing, like some avenging Nemesis, overwhelmed him with her hatred and her grief.

Mariquita, torn from her torpor by this movement and these words, raised her head, and, with deep surprise, regarded this young girl, whom she did not know and whose really extraordinary aspect excited at once her terror and her admiration.

In fact, at that moment Annette was terribly beautiful. Her face, at once strong and pleasing, revealed such an intensity of passion that they all regarded her as if fascinated. One would have said that a transformation had taken place in her. It was indeed Mademoiselle de Kandos, but it was also another woman. Her creole blood lightened up her eyes and reddened her lips. She was an absolute likeness of Mariquita.

"Who are you?" cried the latter, instinctively throwing herself between Annette and Cuchillo, feeling he was threatened, being afraid for him and forgetting all in order to protect him.

Jeanne had not stirred. She had remained motionless, her face of an expression difficult to define, in which grief, severity, contempt and despair were confounded, without it being possible to know which of these feelings was the strongest.

As to Cuchillo, he gazed at Annette, surprised at her presence, yet without fear, as if insensible to any new blow which might fall upon his head.

Mariquita's cry and gesture attracted Annette's attention to her, and she turned towards the *Marquesa.*

"Who am I?" she repeated, fiercely. "I am Mademoiselle de Kandos, the only one here who has a

right to bear that name, except you, my mother; for I am the daughter of Paul de Kandos and Mariquita Antequerra! I am the daughter of him whom this wretch has assassinated—and this monster could listen to me call him: 'My father!' He could clasp me in his arms, all dripping with the blood of Paul de Kandos!"

These words fell from her lips, stinging and cutting, like the blows of a whip.

"My daughter?" murmured the *Marquesa.*

"Yes, my mother!" responded the young girl, with a singular accent. She paused and looked at Mariquita. Her nerves became relaxed. Her expression altered. She wrung her hands, her bosom heaved with sobs, which could not break forth.

"Oh! my mother! my mother!" murmured she, speaking to herself more than to Mariquita, "is it thus that I ought to meet you again?"

She staggered. Mariquita caught her in her arms, in order to keep her from falling, regarding her, greatly moved and almost beside herself, with admiration mixed with timidity.

Jeanne approached them. She was as pale and as rigid as marble. Her movements were slow.

"Madame," said she, addressing herself to the creole, in a voice which was firm, although hollow and humble in tone, "take this child away. She has heard enough. She has even heard too much! You are her mother. You alone, here, have the right of speaking to her, of watching over her, and of loving her. Take her away. Do not be afraid. No one contests your rights and your title. All shall be restored to you. To-morrow you shall reenter this house, to leave it no more. I shall have left it, before an hour. Leave me this hour to hear what my husband—he was my husband—still has to say; to come to a final resolution and make my farewell arrangements."

Mariquita, without loosening her hold of Annette,

had turned towards Jeanne and looked at her, without anger, but hesitatingly.

"Madame," said Jeanne, "I pray you do this! Leave us alone."

Her tone was beseeching but also authoritative. There was, above all, a touching dignity about it which went to Mariquita's heart.

"Come, my child," said she softly in Annette's ear. And, leading her unresistingly along, for the young girl, now, with difficulty stifled her sobs and seemed to have lost all her strength, the two women left the apartment.

Cuchillo had not made a movement nor said a word. He kept his face concealed in his hands.

When the mother and daughter had disappeared, Jeanne turned her face towards her husband, but did not approach him.

"Go on, and finish," she slowly said to him. "I must hear and know all."

He shuddered from head to foot, and let his hands fall to his side.

"I will finish," said he, in a suppressed voice.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CULPRIT AND HIS JUDGE.

THEN he related how he had come to the Chateau de Kandos, knowing the old duke to be blind, and conducted by Louis Clermont, whose plans and counsels he had docilely followed.

"You know the rest," he finally said, in a dull voice. "It has passed under your eyes." And he stopped.

"Is this all?" said she, with the same firm and cold accent.

"All, yes—still—"

"What?"

"I did not know that I was the illegitimate brother of Paul de Kandos."

"How did you learn that?"

"From the duke."

"When?"

"On his death-bed."

Cuchillo shuddered on recalling the terrible scene which ended the third part of this recital.

"I do not understand you very well," said Jeanne again. "He still took you for his legitimate son, for him whom he had cursed and driven away, and in whose repentance he at last believed?"

"That is true," replied Cuchillo. "And that is why, seeing death approach, he confided to me the secret of the other son's existence. He regretted this sin, he regretted having abandoned this child, and he knew not what had become of him. Remorse had seized him. He begged me to seek out his son, to love him, and to give him a share of the

fortune I was about to inherit if I ever found him. I comprehended the atrocious truth, when he named my mother as the young girl he had seduced at Toulouse when he was a student there."

"So," said Jeanne softly, "*he* died reassured, satisfied, believing in you, and hoping that his last wishes would be accomplished." She paused, and then added bitterly: "He, at least, preserved his delusions to the end."

Cuchillo, on hearing these words, bowed his head still lower, and his features expressed such agony that his wife noticed it.

"Is it possible that I am mistaken?" she quickly exclaimed.

He had wished to remain silent on this point, but she would not permit it.

"Speak!" she continued. "I see that you have not told me all."

"I beg of you——" he murmured, joining his hands in entreaty. But she was pitiless.

"Haven't you the courage to be sincere? And do you recoil before the confession, when you did not recoil before the acts themselves?"

Cuchillo recovered himself.

"You are right. The expiation should be complete." Still, he hesitated for a second.

"I am waiting!"

"Well, Jeanne, this wretched old man, whom I had deceived, had not the consolation of dying before he knew the truth."

"Ah!" said she. "You told him——"

"Overcome by this revelation, distracted with horror of my crime, the truth escaped my lips——"

"And he understood?"

"Yes—. I fled from his bedside, while he was crying out in a faint voice: 'Stop the assassin!'"

There was a short silence.

"And, so, he died in despair!" at length Jeanne murmured. "That was most infamous on your part!"

"Oh! I did not wish to do it. Horror had rendered me mad for an instant!"

There was another pause. Jeanne, still cold and stiff, appeared plunged in deep thought.

"And it was under these circumstances," she all at once resumed, "that you married me, made me your companion, and gave me this name, stolen with the aid of murder and falsehood; this name, which did not belong to you, which belonged to the still living widow of Paul de Kandos, the woman whose lover you have been and who loves you yet! And, now, I have no rights; neither to the name you gave me, nor to the stolen title and fortune I have been using for two years!"

Cuchillo had fallen on his knees and clasped his hands.

"That is my crime," said he, "the one for which I shall die!"

"That is *one* of your crimes," she replied, in a vibrating voice. "And, perhaps, it is the most cowardly. What had I done to you? Why take me? I did not even bring you any money!"

"Jeanne," replied the poor wretch, still kneeling at her feet, "do you not recall that it was not I who desired this marriage, but the duke?"

"The duke intended me for Paul de Kandos—not for his murderer. He destined me for his repentant son, redeemed through labor and suffering. He esteemed me enough for that!"

"Hear me, Jeanne; listen to me. I am unable to defend myself. I am a wretch. I know it—I see it. No one can judge me more severely than I judge myself. In none could I ever inspire more of horror and contempt than I inspire in myself at this moment. I condemn all my crimes, although fate has had more to do with them than has my will, and they have always disgusted me; but as for my marriage with you—Oh! let me tell you—I swear that I am sincere—that I do not lie—. Well! never, no, *never* had I dreamt of being your hus-

band! *Never* had I thought of demanding your hand! And, nevertheless, I loved you. Oh! yes, I loved you with all the strength of my heart!"

"*You!*"

"Yes, I! I loved you at first sight! I loved you ardently, yet respectfully, as one adores a saint! and forbade myself ever to think that you could be mine. I did not even wish to acknowledge my own love to myself. You must remember very well that not a word came from my lips, not a glance escaped my eye, to disturb your calmness and your virgin modesty. I was happy in seeing you, in hearing you and in breathing the same air. I, above all, desired to conquer your esteem, and show myself worthy of it. The old duke was not mistaken in attributing to you the change wrought in him whom he took for his son."

Jeanne shrugged her shoulders.

"That entered into your play!" said she, disdainfully.

Cuchillo placed his hands to his breast, like a man who had received a thrust from a knife.

"Ah!" murmured he, "if you knew how you wrong me!" He was silent a moment, and resumed: "But, you are right! I have done you so much wrong that you will never be able to do me enough; and you may tread me under your feet and I shall only say: 'Thanks!' Still," he cried more forcibly, "do not be unjust. All that I have said of my sentiments towards you, of the influence you have exercised over me, is true, and I would like to convince you of it. As for the rest I am guilty. It was infamous, my marrying you. But I loved you purely and deeply, and did not think of offering you my hand until the duke said to me: 'You will marry this woman. I wish it. She, alone, can bring you back to goodness!' In place of being joyful and accepting the realization of this unheard of happiness, which I had forbidden myself even to dream of, I was silent and fled like a madman."

Jeanne remained silent. Not a muscle of her face, usually so soft and kind, relapsed from its implacable rigidity. One would have said that she was stone and her heart bronze.

"And yet it was true that you had converted me to good. Since I had known you I was changed. Another man had been born and developed in me. I was ashamed of my past and horrified at my present. I was my own judge. I wanted to be an honest man. For the moment I even thought I might become one."

A sob tore his breast.

"I swear, Jeanne, if I had known you earlier in my life I would never have been the guilty man I have been. Alas! it was too late to save me!"

"It was not too late to injure me!" exclaimed Jeanne.

"That is true. I committed this last crime, this last cowardly action, of accepting the unhoped for happiness of gaining the woman I loved—. Who would have resisted, in my place?"

"An honest man!" replied she.

"Yes, I should have fled, I know it. But, had I had the strength, as I often had the desire, I was not free to act."

"Why?"

"Ah! why? Alas! must I recall to your attention the fact that I did not belong to myself—that I belonged to this wretch, my accomplice and my master, by the supremacy of his villany! Louis Clermont!"

"The steward, Bernard!" said she, with a sort of cold irony which was torture to Cuchillo. He would have a hundred times preferred insults, violence, threats—anything, rather than this cool contempt which told him that this woman's heart was dead to him. Still he continued. So long as he was speaking she remained with him. He saw her and felt her glance upon him, and this was something.

"Clermont would not permit me to escape. He

had a hold on me. I was his, tied to him by mutual crime and infamy."

"True!"

"Nevertheless, Jeanne——"

She made an impatient gesture.

"Let me give you that name for the last time. Nevertheless, Jeanne, you can see plainly that you have wrought a transformation in me. Are these avowals and my present conduct those of the villain I formerly was? No! The Cuchillo of former days would never have felt or acted thus. He who speaks to you, who is at your feet, is the man who has loved Mademoiselle de Léon, whom she has loved, who has lived through her and for her, who has become converted by contact with her, who has dreamt of being less unworthy of her, and of meriting to a certain extent, the immense happiness which for two years he has enjoyed, but which is now over—dead!——"

He stopped, and there was another interval of silence.

"Monsieur," finally said Jeanne, "nothing that is here is ours, neither mine nor yours. Everything belongs to Mariquita, widow of Paul de Kandos, and to her daughter, Annette."

"I know it," he replied.

"All must be returned to them. Unfortunately, I cannot return that which I have unlawfully expended on myself. I did not know I was stealing it!"

"What are you going to do?" asked he.

"Before an hour I shall have departed—forever; carrying with me nothing but the dress I wear."

"Where shall you go?"

"That is my own affair."

"What will become of you?"

"What does it matter to you?"

"It will be misery."

"Anything is better than dishonor."

There was another pause.

She directed her steps towards the door; he followed her with his eyes, his hands outstretched, but not daring to say a word to detain her.

She turned around at the door.

"And what have you decided to do?" she asked coldly.

"I? I am going to die."

"You intend to kill yourself?"

"Yes!"

"You will do well!" And, with these words, she left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

CUCHILLO.

CUCHILLO remained for some time in the position in which Jeanne had left him. His wife's last words rang like a funeral knell in his ears. Her last glance had frozen him. He was in a state of complete prostration, a sort of absolute lack of will and sensibility. All he was conscious of was the echo of a voice saying to him: "You will do well to kill yourself!" and a feeling of coldness, resulting from Jeanne's last glance.

Little by little a consciousness of the situation returned to, and awakened, him. All was not over. He was not dead yet. A last act remained to be performed. He arose, took a few steps and returned to his senses. His loneliness, in this large and richly furnished room where his fate had been decided, caused him horror.

Beside, a servant, or other chance comer, might enter the room at any moment, and he did not wish to be surprised in his present distracted state.

He went out of the room with a staggering step, crossed the antechamber without meeting anyone, rapidly mounted the stairs like a man fleeing from observation, and at length gained his study.

He let himself fall into a chair. This iron man's physical strength was now completely gone.

He had often marched for days, famished, his lips parched with thirst and his head scorched by the rays of a tropical sun. But he had never felt such lassitude as this! Now, his whole life passed before his eyes; and, of this dark life of vice and bloodshed, only two bright spots shone forth:

They were two women: *Mariquita, Jeanne!*

Through them he had tasted the only joys of his existence. Through them, now, all was bitterness. They had made him live. They killed him. Mariquita—he did not bear her any malice. She had just struck him a frightful blow, yet he did not feel any hatred or anger against her. If she had been present he would not have addressed a single reproach to her.

As to Jeanne: he blessed her in her hardness, and tears mounted to his eyes on remembering her pale face.

At times he saw her in the past, smiling upon him and passing her delicate white hand over his forehead, to drive away the clouds which had gathered there when he thought of how culpable he had been towards her.

He heard her musical voice, soft as a caress, saying to him: "Is it Jeanne, Jeannette, or Jeanneton, that my Paul wants?"

Then, all at once, the charming vision disappeared. There re-appeared before his eyes the new, unknown Jeanne, who said to him coldly: "You are going to kill yourself; you will do well."

"In fact, I must die!" he said to himself.

He resolutely arose. His fatigue had disappeared.

"Life is impossible. Jeanne despises me. She no longer loves me. Besides, I have had enough of this disputed existence. What could I do, now? Recommence the struggle, submit afresh to the odious yoke of Clermont? No, never! I would suffer more than

a thousand deaths without Jeanne. She has judged and condemned me. It is for me to execute the sentence. That will be easy!"

He went to his desk, opened the secret drawer and took his revolver from it. Then he paused, placed the revolver on top of the desk, felt once more in the drawer and drew forth a package of manuscript, the confession he had at one time destined for the "little duchess."

"Of what use is it now?" he murmured. "I have told her all."

He then took a match, and, approaching the fire-place, set on fire, without reading them, the pages in which he had uncovered his heart. This done, he returned to the desk, again picked up the pistol, looked at it and placed it to his temple. His hand did not in the least tremble. It was not death he was afraid of, it was life.

But, at the moment of placing his finger on the trigger, he again stopped, and lowered the weapon. A sudden thought had crossed his mind.

What?—Mariquita? No!

If he had arrested his finger, as it was about to send him to eternity, it was again for Jeanne's sake. He was afraid that she might hear the fatal shot, and might see his corpse, his brains scattered and his blood on the floor.

"I will kill myself when she has departed!" he said to himself, at the same time ringing his bell.

A servant knocked at the door. Cuchillo opened it. Now he was calm and could show himself.

"Ask madame's maid to see if her mistress is at home," said he, in his usual voice to the servant. The latter withdrew, but re-appeared in a few minutes.

"Well?"

"Madame has retired to her chamber."

"Thanks."

"Has monsieur any message to send to madame?"

"No. You may go."

Left alone, the false duke approached the window. This window looked upon the court-yard, and from it one could see all who entered or left the house.

"I will keep watch," said the unhappy man to himself.

"As she is still in the house she cannot leave it without my seeing her. As soon as she shall have passed out, as soon as she is far enough off not to be able to hear, I will blow out my brains."

He partially opened the curtain, seated himself before the window, in order to see without being himself seen, and waited.

In this manner an hour passed by.

Suddenly he trembled and leaned eagerly forward.

Jeanne's slight form had at last appeared. She was descending the steps leading from the house. The ex-convict become mortally pale. Had he, then, hoped for something different?

"I will wait five minutes longer," he continued to himself, "in order to give her time enough to leave the neighborhood."

He drew out his watch and counted the seconds. The five minutes expired. Unhesitatingly he raised his arm and placed the muzzle of the pistol against the side of his head. His back was towards the door.

At the very instant he was about to discharge the revolver it was torn violently from his hand and thrown to the opposite side of the room.

Surprised, he turned around.

Jeanne stood before him.

All at once, with an almost superhuman force, she seized him in her arms, exclaiming:

"Cuchillo, I love you—I love you!"

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH THE READER LEARNS LITTLE.

MARIQUITA, as the reader will recollect, at Jeanne's entreaty had left the *salon*, carrying with her Annette, who was in a half fainting condition.

The creole had been glad to make her escape. The interview which had just taken place, had produced a very different impression upon her from any she could have anticipated if she had been forewarned of what was to occur.

She no longer felt any of the anger, jealousy and hatred which had brought her to this house, with the hope of tearing Cuchillo from his wife's arms and regaining the man she loved. All this had disappeared and melted away before Cuchillo's despair. She had never for a moment believed that he would make this terrible confession.

And the greatness of his love for "the little duchess," in place of increasing her exasperation, actually touched her; a strange, yet, nevertheless, logical state of feeling, for the human heart is full of just such contradictions.

An ardent and passionate woman, still half savage at bottom, she would not have shuddered at the sight of her rival's blood. She could have even stabbed her herself with a ferocious joy, but these moral sufferings, these heart agonies were, for her, a new spectacle, a sort of unknown world, in which she had placed her foot for the first time. It was a foreign country to her. This struck into a part of her soul which had never before been moved. Cuchillo's passion never softened her. To see him, whom

she loved, suffering thus, and through her, pained her.

Jeanne's appearance and manners had also inspired her with a sort of instinctive respect. Her sweetness and dignity awed Mariquita and went to her heart, as something grand and new. She felt herself grow smaller, and she regretted what she had done. No one had resisted her, attacked her, or reproached her. She had not run any risk. It now almost seemed to her that she had been cowardly. Some shame and many regrets took possession of her. To go away was a relief to her.

What would she do later on? Should she return and reclaim her rights as the widow of Paul de Kandos, her incontestable rights? She had not even asked herself the question. Another embarrassment was, she had recovered her daughter; her daughter whom she did not know, whom she had never seen since her birth, and of whom she had never thought, except to congratulate herself at not having in her adventurous life this extra care and charge.

Once out of the *salon*, Annette appeared to recover a little strength.

"Oh! let us fly from this accursed house!" she cried with feverish violence. "This man causes me horror, I have always hated him, and I was not wrong."

"Yes, my dear child," replied Mariquita, "let us depart. Come with me. We will speak again of all this later on."

They entered the carriage which was awaiting the creole at the door.

"Where shall I take the ladies?" asked the coachman.

Mariquita hesitated a second.

"To the *Bois de Boulogne!*" she finally said.

She did not wish to return home immediately, particularly with her daughter. Without rendering herself a very exact account of her feelings, she had a lively intuition that the new situation she had

brought about would require rapid and serious resolutions, and she felt the need of recovering herself, of seeing a little more clearly into herself.

"Oh! my mother, my mother!" exclaimed Annette, throwing herself into the *Marquesa's* arms with an enthusiasm which greatly surprised the latter, "is this the way I ought to meet you, after having believed you were dead? I have loved you so much, and so longed for you! Oh! I have so long wished to live near you! But now that you are here, you will tear me away forever from the midst of this infamy—— This Cuchillo and this Clermont——"

"Yes, my child," responded Mariquita, caressing her, but not a little embarrassed at this feverish enthusiasm of which she had never suspected the existence, and not daring to deceive, to the extent of replying that she also had dreamt of seeing and embracing her daughter. She found Annette pretty and charming, and she was a trifle proud. At first this flattered the mother's vanity.

"You will speak to me of my father, will you not?" continued Annette. "I have never known him, either, and I do not believe a word of the infamous allusions made by this wretch."

Mariquita trembled. The situation was not comfortable. For the first time she felt ashamed of her past life.

How could she say to this young girl, who even intimidated her a little by her manner and the ways of a world so different from the one in which the *Marquesa* had lived, that which she would have to say to her?

"Undoubtedly," said she, "I shall have a thousand things to tell you, my beautiful child, but, later on."

"We will avenge him!" said Annette in a gloomy voice.

"Who?" asked Mariquita.

"My father, Paul de Kandos. We will take revenge on his assassin."

The creole trembled, and contracted her eyebrows. She did not know what to say, and was secretly irritated at seeing her husband mourned for and at hearing her lover condemned. She hesitated for an instant; but she was not a woman to satisfy herself with uncertainty and hesitation.

"I must take the bull by the horns," she said to herself, like a true daughter of a *gaucho*. "Listen, my dear Annette, I understand the sentiment which animates you; but I do not share it."

Annette sat up and regarded her mother with astonishment.

"You forget that your father wished to assassinate me, and that it was only by a sort of miracle that I escaped from the abominable death he had prepared for me."

"It is true then?" said the young girl. "Yes, I knew, in fact, I divined that he had made you unhappy, although no one ever told me so and though my grandfather appeared to hate you. Besides, it was you whom I loved in my dreams, and not he—— but that does not excuse his assassin——"

"Annette; before pronouncing sentence and condemning anyone, you must first know exactly what has occurred."

Annette, after a movement of enthusiasm, due to the over-excited state of her nerves, and which was, after all, but the last lingering remembrance of her childish dreams, in which she had idealized the absent mother, whom she believed to be a persecuted victim, now began to grow colder and colder. Doubts were born. The sympathetic current had not been established.

"I cannot forget," hastily pursued Mariquita, "that it was to avenge my supposed death that Cuchillo struck down Paul de Kandos. He had challenged him to a fair duel.—He risked his life and was about to fall—. It was Louis Clermont who turned a fair and equal combat into a crime and an assassination."

In his recital, which Annette had overheard, Cuchillo had never said plainly, so a virtuous young girl could understand him, that he had been Mariquita's lover. It was unnecessary. Jeanne knew the truth. Her mother's words first rudely awakened her to the truth. She now detached herself from her companion's arms and moved suddenly and abruptly away from her.

Mrriquita understood perfectly well what was in her daughter's thoughts.

"So much the worse!" she said to herself. "But, still, she must have known it, sooner or later."

She commenced to more and more regret her violent intervention in Cuchillo's life, the unforeseen consequences of which began to display themselves before her eyes with a disheartening effect.

"I did not love your father," said she, resolutely, like a woman accustomed to her independence, and who struggled against the yoke which commenced to chafe her shoulders. "We were not made for each other. Our marriage was a piece of folly and regretable on both sides. I will relate my life to you; but, later on, when we shall know each other better. You, also, will have things to tell me, in regard to your life of a young girl."

"She ought to have had some love affair," thought Mariquita, "at her age and as pretty as she is. *That* is the way I shall catch her."

"Let me look at you," she resumed aloud. "You are indeed beautiful, and I am sure that I shall love you—if you love me."

"Yes, mother!" coldly replied Annette. "But what are you going to do? Will you allow this convict to bear the name of my father and your husband, the name that you and I alone are entitled to?"

"It is necessary to reflect on all this," responded Mariquita, greatly troubled. "I confess to you that I am so overcome—and the situation is so complicated—"

She was visibly affected. She was thinking of Cuchillo, and did not really know what she wished to do.

"Ah! my God!" suddenly exclaimed Annette, with a cry of grief. "And Jeanne, poor Jeanne, innocent of everything—It is horrible! Ah! I wish I was dead!"

And she concealed her face in her hands.

"This woman! his wife!" repeated Mariquita, with a touch of jealousy and animosity. "Oh! she!—" she paused a second, and then finished in a low voice: "She is happier than I am! *He loves her!*"

CHAPTER XI.

MARIQUITA TAKES A RESOLUTION.

THERE was a long silence between the two women.

The weather was magnificent, and the carriages of the leaders of the *beau-monde* had commenced to make their appearance in the *bois*.

Neither Annette nor her mother took any notice of what was going on around them. The interior drama which stirred the very depths of their hearts so absorbed them that the outside world was absolutely nothing.

In finding themselves together the mother and daughter felt more like strangers than before they had met.

They belonged to two entirely different and distinct worlds. There was nothing in common between them; between the former rope-dancer, opera singer and gaucho's daughter, a *bohémienne* by education, tastes and feelings, and this young girl who had been reared and educated by her grandfather in the strictest seclusion; accustomed only to the ideas

and usages of the old-fashioned civilization of Europe.

Moreover, it so happened that the mother loved all that which the daughter hated; and that the daughter hated all that which the mother loved.

Mariquita loved Cuchillo; and detested Paul de Kandos and Jeanne.

Annette loved Jeanne, respected the dead Paul de Kandos and execrated Cuchillo. Moreover, she wished to avenge her father's death.

All this had not yet plainly shaped itself in their consciousness, nor, in fact, presented itself with this terrible distinctness; but it was all beginning to appear to them.

For Annette the situation was yet more painful and cruel than for Mariquita.

Annette fell from the hights of a long cherished dream, and the sudden shock of awakening added its stings and bruises to those from which she was already suffering.

What most occupied Mariquita's thoughts was the material side of the situation.

First of all, she wished to save Cuchillo, whom she had never intended injuring.

Next, knowing Clermont, and of what he was capable, for she was not ignorant of the fact that he had killed Coco, the *Death's-Head*, in order to suppress an inconvenient and threatening witness, she feared some violence on his part.

She must, then, prevent Annette from acting; or, at all events, from committing any imprudence; which was only possible by avoiding absolutely every subject of a nature to awaken her hatred or to excite her imagination.

It was, therefore, necessary to place herself, as well as her daughter, in some refuge which would be safe from Louis Clermont. At all events, Mariquita, hesitating as she was between two contradictory resolutions, understood the necessity of pre-

serving an entire independence for her ulterior actions.

To do this it became necessary to isolate herself and disappear for several days.

In solitude, and *tete-a-tete* with her daughter, she would manage to recover her usual coolness and become sufficiently master over this high-spirited child to be able to control her will and prevent her from opposing her plans.

Mariquita was a woman of action, and with her to think was to act; so she leaned out and called to the coachman:

"Drive to Saint-Cloud, and take us to some respectable hotel."

Her plan was decided upon. She wished to leave no traces of herself and Annette by which they could be followed.

At Saint-Cloud she stopped at a small hotel, where she engaged an apartment consisting of a drawing-room and two bedrooms, and two other rooms overhead for Mono and Carmencita. This done, she left Annette there, first making the young girl promise to await her return. She then hastily returned to her apartments in Paris, from whence she took certain indispensable articles of dress and the toilet, and before returning to Saint-Cloud with the little half-breed gave Mono detailed orders of which we have already seen the execution. The reader will remember with what intelligence Mono fulfilled the diplomatic mission with which he had been charged.

On her return to Saint-Cloud the creole found that her daughter had been faithful to her promise, but traces of tears were plainly visible on her countenance.

She had also been writing, for a sealed letter lay on a table near the window in the room destined for her own particular use.

Mariquita had been, on her side, turning over the situation in every phase. She had looked at it from

every point of view, and had come to this conclusion:

1st. That the greatest thorn in her side was the presence of her daughter.

2nd. That since she could not tear out this thorn, she must, at any price, so arrange it that she (the thorn) should be as little of a pain and hindrance to her as possible.

The *Marquesa* was uncontrollable, but she was sincere. There was no hypocrisy in her nature. On the contrary she had a horror of falsehood and a certain violence of passion which, at need, drove her to the utmost limits of frankness. This did not prevent her, however, from being shrewd and managing.

"My dear child," said she to Annette, on her return from Paris, "we do not know each other. Despite the ties which unite us we are absolutely strangers; not only because we have never met until today, but also because our lives and educations have been so very different. The result is that we do not speak the same language, or even comprehend the same things."

Annette listened to her with some surprise but never once looked at her.

"Now," pursued the mother, "I am no longer young enough to change or reform my habits. You also have arrived at an age when one's nature is formed. I will respect your ideas, will you respect mine? This is all I ask of you."

Annette raised her head. The slightly brutal sincerity of this speech did not displease her. It put her at her ease. She listened calmly as Mariquita continued:

"I am your mother, and I am well disposed to love you, because you are charming. I also desire that you shall love me a little, when you know me better, that you shall love me *as I am*, and not as you have imagined me to be."

Annette made a gesture as if she would speak, but her mother continued :

"If it cannot be thus, I shall regret it—but I hope it may be : I will do my best to accomplish it."

"And I, also, I promise you !" said Annette, won by this original manner of putting their reciprocal situation, and easily carried away by all that was exciting and unusual.

"Very well, my child," replied Mariquita. "Meanwhile, let us be companions, and promise me to do nothing without my consent ; because, otherwise, under the pretext of avenging your father—whom you never knew any better, or even so well as you do me—and who never loved you a particle, it is I, your mother, whom you will most injure."

"I will do nothing without first telling you of it in advance," said Annette, becoming once more pale and cold.

After a short silence Mariquita resumed :

"I will now relate my life to you, or, at least, as much of it as will enable you to understand my conduct, my affections, and my hatreds. But, just now, there are questions of personal safety which interest us both, and in regard to which we cannot fail to agree, without touching on subjects and considerations which we will speak of at some other time, when I shall have come to a final decision, which I have not yet done. We will put Cuchillo aside, for the present," here she slightly hesitated. "There is a man near him whom you know, as you know all ; it is Louis Clermont !"

"Oh ! yes !" interrupted Annette, shuddering.

"You know what has been his part in this drama. It was he who conceived and executed it. Now, he is capable of anything in order to assure himself impunity and close the mouths which might speak, to suppress all the evidence by suppressing all the witnesses. He has already done it in one case."

"I know it !"

"When he learns that you know the truth, and

when he fears that you wish to avenge your father, he will become afraid—. Now, fear renders him ferocious, and in order to silence either of us he would resort to methods which you can easily divine."

"Assassination!" interrupted Annette.

"Yes, my child, perhaps so. In any case we should be forewarned, which is to be forearmed. He cannot injure Cuchillo without injuring himself. Their destinies are united."

"By crime and infamy!" again interrupted Annette.

"So be it!" said Mariquita, with a lofty indifference. She loved him thus, that was all!

"Therefore," she coolly went on, "it is necessary that he should remain ignorant, for a time, as to what has become of us."

She then related to the other all she had just done.

"You can now easily understand that, while we are coming to a decision as to what it is best for us to do, on no account must anyone know where we are."

"You are right," said Annette, "and I do not wish to make you run any unnecessary risk; still—"

"Well?"

"There is some one who will be seeking for me, and who will be wild with grief when he learns of my departure, and I would like to relieve his uneasiness. Even from your point of view this would be the most prudent thing to do."

"Who is it!" asked Mariquita. But Mademoiselle de Kandos made no response to this question, and only added:

"I have written this person a line, only one line, telling him: 'Do not seek for me. I am in safety, and you shall hear from me.'"

Annette had become very red while speaking, and appeared to be much moved.

"But," she continued, "as your life is concerned, mother, I will not send this letter if you think it will be imprudent."

"Did you say nothing else in it?"

"No, nothing which could compromise you," said Annette, again not exactly answering the question put by her mother. Mariquita understood this reservation.

"You do not speak of me in the letter?'

"No!"

"You do not give your address?"

"No!"

"Then I see no reason why you should not send it, provided it is mailed at Paris, and I will see that is done."

"Thanks!" said Annette, greatly relieved.

"Give me the letter!"

"Hear it is."

Mariquita read the address: "Monsieur Gaston Lapierre, Trois-Couronnes street."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with surprise.

"You know him?" cried Annette.

"Well! Louis Clermont's son!"

"How do you know it?"

Mariquita looked at her and gave a smile.

"He is your lover!" said she, slowly.

"No, mother," proudly replied Annette, after having reflected a moment: "He is my betrothed!"

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH ONE SEES THAT ONE SOMETIMES NEEDS THE ASSISTANCE OF ONE WHO IS HUMBLER THAN ONE'S-SELF.

IT is time that we returned to the house in which Madame Lapierre lived.

She had the greatest desire to forewarn Jeanne, and, by some word or sign, make her comprehend that they were not alone. But she dared not. She more than suspected that her husband was there, behind the door on the watch, and she knew him too well to run the risk of exasperating him. Her chief desire was to send away the duchess as soon as possible, before her son's return, fearing what might take place if Gaston encountered Clermont under the present state of affairs.

Once in the room the duchess let herself fall on a chair with a show of extreme lassitude, and slowly raised her veil.

Madame Lapierre could not refrain from a gesture of surprise on observing how altered were Jeanne's features, although they were animated by an extraordinary expression of energy and calm resolution.

"What procures me the honor of your visit?" murmured Clermont's wife, not wishing to manifest a surprise which might be indiscreet.

"My dear Madame Lapierre," softly replied Jeanne, "I have always had the greatest esteem for you as well as for your son. Of this I have come to give you a proof, in asking you to render me a

great service, without questioning me or asking me anything I could not answer."

"Oh! madame la duchesse," quickly exclaimed Gaston's mother, "I have no questions to put to you, and I will be only too happy to render you any service—if it depends solely on me, though I do not see how in my humble position I can be useful to you."

Jeanne meditated a moment, and then resumed, in a low voice:

"Madame, my husband and I have lost the mansion we inhabited at Neuilly."

"I know it," interrupted Madame Lapierre.

"Ah! you know it! How is that?"

"I learned it from my son, who went this morning to your residence—"

"To see Mademoiselle de Kandos," said Jeanne, with a sigh. "Yes, I understand. Poor children!" she added, almost in a whisper. "Well, madame?"

"He found the house empty—"

"Yes. But, still, do not ask me what has become of Mademoiselle de Kandos," added Jeanne, in a voice of emotion, "for I cannot answer you."

"Oh! I ask you nothing, madame!"

"Thanks! Well, then, we have left that mansion, my husband and I, never to return to it!"

Madame Lapierre gave a start, but said nothing. Louis Clermont was there!

Raising her head the little duchess proudly resumed:

"We have left that house because we are ruined, absolutely ruined."

"Oh! my God! what do you say?" exclaimed Madame Lapierre, carried away by her kind heart and her sympathy for the Kandos family.

"The truth, madame. Why and how we have lost our fortune—I must keep to myself," she continued, "and I beg you to content yourself with my simple announcement of the fact without seeking to know more than I can tell you."

"Oh! I ask nothing—I wish to know nothing. Preserve your secrets!"

"Unforeseen—events—have, in a few hours, deprived us of everything—"

Here Jeanne's voice slightly trembled. Not with regret for the lost fortune, but at the remembrance of the terrible revelations we know of. But this emotion did not last long. The brave little woman soon recovered her firmness.

"We are therefore poor!" added she. "But this does not frighten me. I was born poor, I have lived poor, until my marriage, and I shall be poor again—that is all! Only, we must live, and in order to live it is necessary to work." She arose, approached Madame Lapierre and seized her by the hands. "And I have come to ask you for work, madame."

"*You* come to *me!*" murmured Clermont's wife, overcome by this unexpected situation.

"Yes, I come to you, and to you alone! Others would question me, and I do not wish to answer questions. Others would want to know who I am, and henceforth I wish to remain so obscure and unknown that no one will know of my existence."

"Oh! madame—is this possible?" murmured Madame Lapierre, and, carried away by her feeling of sympathy, she instinctively clasped the duchess to her heart as if she were her mother. But, in a moment, perceiving how familiar she had been, she unclasped her arms and drew back a step or two.

Jeanne continued:

"That is what prevents me from utilizing my education by giving lessons. I would also, perhaps, have been able to find a position abroad, in some rich family; but that would necessitate my leaving my husband and going far off from him, and, just now, he needs me too much for me to think of quitting his side."

A thousand questions were on Madame Lapierre's lips, but she had the strength to withhold them. She remembered Clermont's presence. She must

not detain the little duchess. Above all, she must not lead her into saying anything imprudent.

"What I might be able to give you, in the shape of work, would be insufficient and would gain you but a miserable living," was all she could say. Her eyes were full of tears, and she was greatly moved at the spectacle of this sudden ruin; and at the dignity as well as resignation of the duchess.

"I know it—but I will also know how to be content with it." Then Jeanne added, with a sweet smile: "Only, I am not yet at the end of my requests."

"Speak. As far as it is in my power——"

"First, I shall ask you to give me as much work as I can do—"

"All I shall have—"

"And, then, I beg you to have enough confidence in me to allow me to carry away my work without asking me for my address."

"Oh! madame la duchesse!" cried Madame Lapierre. "If you knew how much I love you, respect you and admire you, at this moment, you would speak to me as to a mother—for, after all, I am old enough to be your mother—in place of treating me as a stranger. No, I ask you nothing, I wish to know nothing; make yourself perfectly at home, here, and dispose of me, of all I possess— Ah! I would like to be rich to-day, on your account, as I have frequently wished to be for my son's sake—"

She paused. On speaking of her son her former terror came back lest her son should return before Louis Clermont, whose existence she had temporarily forgotten, had quitted her apartment.

"Thanks, Madame Lapierre," said the little duchess, embracing her. "I also had dreamt for a moment of becoming your sister, for in becoming your son's mother-in-law—but it no longer rests with me." Her voice grew here weaker. "And now I can do nothing but love those whom I always have esteemed and always will love."

She thought of Annette, of Annette gone, without any farewell, and whom she would never see again.

Both women were pale, and held each other by the hand. Suffering and misfortune had drawn them together. Jeanne was the first to recover her self-possession.

"I forgot that I am in haste!" she sighed. "Can you give me any work to carry away with me this evening?"

"In a moment!" hastily cried Madame Lapierre. And almost without knowing what she was doing, she quickly gathered together a number of pieces of work, already begun by her regular work-women, and, making them into a bundle, gave it to the little duchess. In her zeal, Gaston's mother had made a large and heavy package. Jeanne joyfully seized upon it, although it visibly weighed down her arm, little accustomed to fatigue.

"Thanks," said she once more, and she embraced Madame Lapierre again, and resolutely directed her steps towards the door. Ernestine preceded her.

"It is to be hoped that she may not find herself face to face with Clermont!" thought the latter's wife.

She opened the door, her heart beating with frightful rapidity, as if expecting some terrible apparition. She saw no one. The women passed through the little entrance hall. It was empty. Jeanne went out. Madame Lapierre, returning to her room, looked about. Clermont was no longer there.

"Gone!" she murmured, with a sigh of relief. "But he will return," she continued, shuddering at the thought. "What are the misfortunes which have befallen this noble and saintly woman? What misfortunes still threaten us?"

CHAPTER XIII.

JEAN PRUNEAU.

THE letter of which Annette had spoken to her mother, and which Mariquita had promised to have sent to its address, had reached Gaston. It was as follows:

"GASTON:—I am obliged to go away for a time. I am in no danger, and you shall receive news of me. Rest easy. Take no imprudent steps. I need all my strength and courage. We shall see each other again, I swear it to you! When? I do not know! But I love you!

"ANNETTE."

This letter had completely upset the young man. Knowing what he did, through Annette's confidences, he had a slight glimpse of the truth, or, rather, his imagination had made him fear the most tragic and frightful events.

Without regarding the admonitions contained in the letter, he betook himself to Neuilly, in order to see the duchess, saying to himself that through her he could get sure and positive information.

The mansion was empty! That is, of all but the servants.

And this sudden departure, disappearance is a better name for it, of an entire family had ended by increasing his agony—as a lover.

The blow was all the more cruel, that it struck him at the moment when his heart was full of joy and hope; at the moment when he had written to the duke:

"I am ready to marry Mademoiselle Annette de Kandos!"

From the moment in which he knew that the marriage was possible, and from the moment when Annette, knowing of Clermont's existence, consented to bear his name and begged Gaston not to be more scrupulous than herself, he could calculate almost to a day when she whom he loved would be his.

Suddenly, he felt, without knowing why, that important events were threatening the happiness which he had believed already in his grasp. So he returned to his mother's, after his visit to Neuilly, in a state of extreme agitation. He read Annette's letter over and over, but its contents were not of a nature to re-assure him. For a moment he entertained the terrible fear that the young girl, after having reflected, had recoiled before the idea of uniting herself to the son of an assassin, an escaped galley-slave.

"Ah! I knew very well that I would lose her on the day when she became possessed of my abominable secret!"

Madame Lapierre had in vain endeavored to calm and re-assure her son. But she, too, was almost without hope.

Being unable to remain in one place, he had gone out to try and overcome his mental troubles by physical fatigue.

It was after Gaston's departure that Louis Clermont had, to use his own ironical expression, "presented himself in the bosom of his family."

Left alone, poor Madame Lapierre thought over all the scenes we have just described.

Suddenly a pale ray of hope re-animated her visage, on which were visible the traces of great grief.

The duchess's visit, her announcement of their ruin and departure, her concealment of her new residence, and her asking for work by which to gain her daily bread, all went to explain Annette's dis-

appearance and the mysterious strangeness of her letter to Gaston.

Evidently some tragic or overwhelming event had overtaken this family and cast it down from the hight upon which it was founded. So it could not, then, be the revelation of his true name which separated Gaston from Annette. On the contrary, misfortune and trouble could but bring them closer together by diminishing the social distance which separated them. Besides, the little duchess's request proved in what esteem she held Gaston's mother. It was a mark of confidence and even of affection.

Having once entered into this train of ideas Madame Lapierre felt more re-assured. If the duke of Kandos was ruined, neither he, nor his, any longer had anything to fear from Louis Clermont. All this scoundrel cared for in connection with the Kandos family was their fortune. His proceedings with his wife proved that he had been ignorant of this sudden misfortune. Now, he knew it. And, knowing it, he had disappeared, understanding that there was no longer anything to be accomplished by remaining in that place. Henceforth he would not return to the house in *Trois Couronnes* street. That which had brought him there was the interest in the duke's noble family. Being unable to make anything out of them, now that they were poor, he would no longer have any reason for holding to them or mixing himself up in Gaston's affairs.

She gave a long sigh of relief. The more she pondered over these ideas, the farther her mind traveled in this direction, the fuller of life and hope she became.

At first she had resolved not to speak to Gaston of his father's visit. Now, on the contrary, she had determined to tell him all—that is, all except (a mother's natural exception) the horrible threats and frightful treatment to which the wretch had subjected her.

Madame Lapierre would have felt less re-assured

if she could have seen what was taking place in the street at the very time when she was contemplating a situation of affairs so directly contrary to the truth.

In fact, Louis Clermont, towards the end of the conversation between the two women, understanding that he would learn nothing farther by listening at the door, had noiselessly made his escape and had gained the street.

The thing of greatest importance to him was his having re-found the duchess.

The old convict now hid himself in the shadow of an old doorway, decided to await Jeanne's exit. He had not long to wait. She soon made her appearance with her heavy burden, and although she was muffled up in a thick woolen shawl, and closely veiled, he recognized her at once. He followed her at a distance, taking the greatest precautions not to be perceived by her nor to awaken her suspicions.

At first Jeanne marched valiantly along with the light step of a woman of the fashionable world. But it was not long before her heavy package wearied her. She changed it from arm to arm and placed it in different positions. Soon her step, rapid in the beginning, became slower. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour she was compelled to stop and place her burden on some bricks, which were the remnants of an old wall. After a moment's rest she again resumed her way, the ex-convict, agile and unwearied, still following her.

Clermont would have liked to have carried her bundle for her, not in order to relieve her, nor through pity for her, but to get along faster and reach the end of their journey, which was a long one and lasted for more than an hour.

Jeanne at last gained the old *Butte-des-Moulins* quarter, which, at that period, had not yet been demolished. She entered a small street, which the former *gaucho* was unacquainted with and whose name he could nowhere read, and paused before a

sad-looking house bearing a wooden sign, containing the following words:

"FURNISHED ROOMS AND OFFICES."

As late as it was the house-door was open, and a large, red, common-looking man, his head covered with a dirty velvet cap, stood in the doorway, evidently on the watch for some one.

"Ah! here you are at last, Madame Pruneau," he exclaimed, on beholding Jeanne. "I have been impatiently awaiting your arrival."

"What is the matter?" asked Jeanne, in a voice overcome by fatigue and the unusual exertions she had been making.

"Your husband is very ill!"

"Ill! Oh! Heavens! Since when?"

"Two hours ago my wife, on passing your door, heard groans. She entered. The poor man was lyiug on the floor, unconscious. He was in a violent fever and delirious. She dared not leave him, and I have been on the lookout in order to warn you."

"Ah! my God! my God!" murmured Jeanne, and letting fall her bundle, which obstructed her movements, she ran to the stairs, which she hastily mounted.

Louis Clermont had been close enough to overhear the whole of this short convesation.

"*Bueno!*" he said to himself. "They are together! This is where they live. He has resumed his own name. Thunder and lightning! it is to be hoped that he is not going to kick the bucket! Then I *would* be lost."

He entered the house behind the large, red-faced man, who had picked up the package and carried it into a little room which he dignified by the title of lodge.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Clermont to him. "Do Monsieur and Madame Jean Pruneau live here?"

"Yes, sir. Fifth floor, door to the right, number thirty-six."

"Thanks, I will walk up."

"The poor man is very ill."

"Ah, indeed! I will hasten, then. He is an old friend!"

And Monsieur Bernard in turn ascended the same flight of stairs up which Cuchillo's wife had just run.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE.

THE stairs were steep, straight and slippery, and the convict, after having mounted the first flights rapidly, slackened his speed and stepped as cautiously and silently as possible. From above he heard the voices of two women speaking in lowered tones, and one of these he recognized as Jeanne's.

The stairway was dark, but a little light coming from the floor above him announced that the door of a room was open.

He ascended a few more steps when he perceived, directly opposite the head of the stairs, an open door, through which he looked into a very small room; more than half of it was filled by a cheap iron-bedstead.

Lying on this bed was Cuchillo, his face a-burning and his eyes wild-looking and blood-shot. Near the bed stood two women; one, a middle-aged woman; the other, Jeanne.

A tallow candle in a brass candlestick was burning feebly on a white wooden table at the head of the bed.

The woman with Jeanne, apparently the wife of the big red janitor, was finishing her relation to the "little duchess" of how she had found the latter's husband almost unconscious and murmuring senseless words, and how she and a neighboring woman had with great difficulty lifted him into his bed.

Now he was much calmer, and as his wife was with him she, Madame Manouri (the janitor's wife,) would go back to her duties. If she should be needed again, it would only be necessary to call her. But the most urgent thing to do at present was to send for a physician, for the poor man appeared very ill. Having said this, Madame Manouri withdrew, shaking her head with a knowing air which seemed to indicate that she did not augur very well either for the patient or his disease.

Louis Clermont hastily drew back into a dark corner in order to allow her to pass without seeing him, and, after she had gone, he resumed his post of observation on the stairs. This was all the easier to him that the janitor's wife had left the door half open, in order to see her way, and Jeanne, stooping over her husband, had never thought to reclose it. She had passed one arm under the sick man's shoulders so as to raise his head to a comfortable position, and she covered his burning forehead and lips with ardent kisses, saying to him between partially stifled sobs:

"Jean, do you recognize me? Cuchillo, look at me. I love you, you know I love you!"

At these words uttered by this voice the sick man seemed to partially recover his intelligence, for a smile appeared on his lips, already parched by the fever.

"Jeanne, nurse me!" he murmured. "I am your child! Protect, defend me! Oh! how thirsty I am!" And he again closed his eyes.

"My God! my God!" cried Jeanne, standing upright, with an expression of fright. "We have no money! How shall I care for him? How save him?"

* * * * * * * *

Never had she so loved him!

On learning who and what he was her first feeling had been one of despair and indignation. She

had felt only anger, grief, and an immense contempt, and it was in all sincerity and without any reservations that she had said to him:

"You will do well to kill yourself!"

On leaving him, after saying these words, she had gone to her own room, determined to go away, not weeping but simply shuddering, as if she had just been present at some hideous spectacle; she only wished to leave this house, in which she had been so happy, feeling that it contained an ineradicable contamination. She had but one thought; that she was wearing a stolen name, which she determined instantly to change.

At the moment when she was about to take her departure, she remembered that there were some letters from this man to her, in which he said he loved her. Letters which she did not wish to leave behind her. There was also the diary she had kept as a young girl, with which we are acquainted, and in which she had told how she loved Paul de Kandos, and where, after having seen Cuchillo, she had repeated: "I love him! He is, in fact, what I dreamed he was."

"I must destroy that!" thought she. "It belongs to me alone. Every trace of my relations with him should disappear."

She resolutely seated herself before her writing-desk, opened it, and drew forth a package of letters, and the sheets on which she had written her innermost thoughts.

Her hand suddenly trembled, and, on taking them out of her desk, some of the leaves fell from her hands. She gathered them up and placed them before her, when her eyes suddenly fell on these lines, which she had formerly written in reference to Paul de Kandos and Mariquita:

"*Can one love and condemn the person one loves, even after one knows that that person is culpable?*"

"*If such was the case, what would distinguish love from any other feeling?*"

On reading these words, which chance had thrown under her eyes and which seemed an indirect answer to her actual thoughts, she shivered. She remained for some time thoughtful. Little by little she again saw Cuchillo at her feet, pale and trembling, but his face bearing the imprint of a despairing resignation which was not wanting in dignity. Once more she heard his words. He was saying to her:

"I was a criminal, and you have made me an honest man. Your love has elevated, ennobled and purified me. Since I have loved you I have become another person. I have regretted my past. I have tried to render myself worthy of you."

And he had asked for no mercy. There was nothing vile or cowardly in his expression. No regret for his lost name and fortune. He was ready to die, but without bombastic words or any show of bravado. What killed him was her contempt for him; nothing else! And how had this frightful revelation been brought about? Was he compelled to make it? No! If he had consented to accept Mariquita's falsehood, to follow her, to live with her and abandon Jeanne, he could have saved everything. And he would have remained rich and the Duke of Kandos.

But he had preferred all other loss rather than leave her whom he loved. Between Jeanne and the Kandos name and fortune he had not hesitated a moment. Nor had he hesitated between Jeanne and shame and death. He had even consented to be no longer loved by her; and, a horrible thing, to be despised by her, to be looked upon with horror!

Oh! yes, he loved her! Never had any woman been loved more. And, yet, Mariquita also adored him. She was beautiful, still, this woman! *She* had given him proofs of her devotion. *She* had sacrificed to him her talent, her fortune and almost her life. *She* had come to avenge his supposed death——. But she asked herself what had she, Jeanne, done for him? Nothing! She had consented to be his

wife, when he was rich and a gentleman! And, when she had learned what he really was, she had cast him off. Mariquita would not have done that! Mariquita had loved him when he was a *gaucho.* It was not Paul de Kandos, the duke and millionaire, that *she* had sought, but Cuchillo, the convict!

Mariquita loved him as he loved Jeanne. The "little duchess" arose and took a few steps. Suddenly she violently pressed her hands to her forehead, and exclaimed:

"I love him! I love him still!"

She fell on her knees in a dark corner of the room, and, concealing her face in her hands, prayed, yes, prayed that God might tear this infamous love from her heart.

Then, feeling that this prayer brought her no comfort, she arose and prepared to depart. She felt that if she remained much longer she would remain always.

She hastened from her room, descended the stairs and crossed the garden, in order to leave the place forever.

It was at this instant that Cuchillo saw her, and holding his revolver, gave himself five minutes' reprieve so that she might not hear the sound of the shot.

But, on placing her foot on the sill of the front door, Jeanne again thought of Mariquita and compared her own conduct to that of the creole. She felt how petty and ungrateful she was in comparison with the courtesan.

With a bound she retraced her steps, ran to the house, leaped up the stairs and threw herself into Cuchillo's study just in time to snatch the weapon from his hand.

"I love you, Cuchillo!" she had said to him.

"Thanks! oh, thanks!" murmured the unhappy and distracted man. "Now, I can die, joyfully."

"Die! No, Cuchillo! No, you shall live with me, by me, for me!"

"You forget what I am!"

"Forger, assassin, thief, convict, what does it matter to me? I am your wife and I love you!"

"Jeanne!"

"Cuchillo, I had commenced your cure. I will finish it. It is *you* whom I love, not Paul de Kandos whom I never knew. For two years you have made me the happiest of women. I will repay you with usury! I will make you happy in leading you upward. It is I who have been cruel, and I ask your pardon on my knees. Behold!" and she knelt before him. "Tell me that you forgive me—or kill me!"

He raised her up. He was almost mad with happiness.

"To die—would be easy!" said she, "and I am ready to die with you, if you wish it! But there is a better way; it is to redeem your past by labor and a life of self-abnegation and denial. I will help and sustain you. Forget everything! Forget my cruelty! I was insane. I am your wife, yours forever!"

* * * * * * * *

That evening, when night had come, they departed together, hiding like criminals, and carrying with them nothing but their love and their faith in the future.

Cuchillo believed he was dreaming and feared to awake.

With the few francs he had about his person they hired a poor little furnished room without a fireplace, a wretched place, yet the price of this shelter used up nearly all of their money.

"To-morrow," said Jeanne, "I will seek work. You will do the same; and you will see how good the bread will taste which we have earned and which we will eat together."

The next day she went to see Madame Lapierre.

But this unparalleled shock had proved too much for Cuchillo's strength. The change from the ex-

treme of grief to that of joy had been too sudden. He had suffered too much, and his sufferings had lasted for too long a period.

Left alone, during the absence of Jeanne, whose voice and caresses had hitherto sustained him, he at last succumbed under the pressure of brain-fever, and when his wife returned it was to find an almost dying man.

CHAPTER XV.

AN INVITATION TO BREAKFAST.

WHEN Louis Clermont had assured himself with his own eyes that Cuchillo was really there, lying on a bed of sickness, from which he might not rise for many long and weary weeks, he judged it useless to show himself to the "little duchess."

The thing of chief importance was to be able to know where to find his accomplice when he needed him. In showing himself to Jeanne he would only frighten her unnecessarily.

He now commenced to see clearly into the existing state of affairs. The duchess knew all. She knew Cuchillo's real name; therefore she must know who Bernard, the steward, was, and, with an unusual amount of modesty, he understood that his presence, above all, at the tragic moment, could only inspire her with the greatest horror and fear.

He had to determine on his line of conduct. First of all, Cuchillo's life must be saved. Not that he cared for his comrade, but Cuchillo represented the fortune of Paul de Kandos. Cuchillo dead, no more money, no more luxury for Clermont, and the old convict would no longer feel assured of a comfortable future in his old age. Annette would then be the heiress, and it was very evident that she would not share her revenues with Bernard, the steward.

Now, Cuchillo not yet having realized anything more than his income from the Kandos Estate, Louis Clermont had not received his share of the fortune, and could put forward no valid claim to any portion of it.

But Cuchillo being restored to health, could he, or would he consent to go on with the fraud which assured their fortune? Clermont was uncertain, but waited to examine into this question when he would be more at leisure. In any case, if Cuchillo should die all would be lost. But while he was alive there remained a chance, the only one, as poor as it was.

This was the old convict's first idea and he clung it, understanding that the time for action was short.

But how could he save Cuchillo without showing himself to the "little duchess"?

"Nothing could be easier!" he presently said to himself, striking his forehead.

He immadiately descended the stairs and entered the lodge, where he found the janitor and his wife engaged in conversing. They were evidently deploring the fact of there being a sick person in the house. It would be difficult for them to refuse to render some services to the invalid—and would they be compensated for them? At the moment Clermont entered Madame Manouri uttered the following words, which revealed her train of thought:

"After all, a hospital is not intended for dogs!"

"I am just in time!" thought the old galley-slave; and he continued aloud: "Madame, I am an old friend of Monsieur and Madame Pruneau."

The janitor and his wife remained sullenly silent.

"I wish to be of assistance to them."

The faces of the custodians softened instantaneously.

"But," pursued the steward, "I know the pride of my poor friend's wife."

The couple appeared surprised at this misplaced pride, and even appeared to think it blameworthy.

"I did not, therefore, think it necessary to make

known my presence. It was useless. I knew that you were honest, kind-hearted people."

The husband and wife looked at each other and then at their visitor.

"So I have come," continued the old rogue, "to deposit in your hands the sum of two hundred francs for immediate use." And he drew two bank-notes from his pocket-book.

"Won't you take a seat?" said Madame Manouri, most affably.

"Will you take a little something with us?" added Monsieur Manouri. "Elvira, bring some glasses and a half-pint bottle!"

"It is useless!" replied Clermont. "Take this money, without telling from whom you received it. Do not even speak of it to my friend's wife, I insist upon that. Simply place yourselves at her disposal, furnish everything she may need, whether it is food, or medicine for her husband; spare nothing; and you may be supposed to have advanced these things yourselves, if it pleases you—"

The Manouris listened most attentively, and began to look very complacently upon the kind-hearted gentleman who was going to make them the dispensers of his bounty. The charitable *role* seemed very agreeable to them—when it was at some one else's expense.

"You can let me know when this sum is exhausted, for I will call every day, and I will let you have whatever money may be needed. You understand, do you not? And I can count on your zeal?"

"Oh! certainly, monsieur!" cried Elvira. "She is such a noble lady— I will at once go and place myself at her disposal—"

"She shall live, she and her husband, on the fat of the land," energetically added Monsieur Manouri, "like people for whom nothing is too expensive!"

And, in fact, it was evident that nothing should be too costly for him; quite the contrary.

"That is right," said Clermont. "Now I must

hasten after a doctor. He will be here in a quarter of an hour. I will pay you for your services in addition to what I have already given you." And, with these words, the ex-gaucho disappeared.

"What a generous man!" enthusiastically exclaimed Elvira, when he had gone.

"Humph!" said Monsieur Manouri, "that isn't so clear! I am suspicious of such generosity."

"Why, what are you thinking of? Are you afraid that the banknotes are counterfeits?"

"No!" replied the husband, who had carefully examined them, "but, one is not so prodigal of money honestly gained."

"What is that to us?"

"You are right! Go up stairs and comfort this poor woman!"

"I will, at once!"

Louis Clermont, on leaving the house, had directed his steps towards a neighboring drug-store, where he demanded the address of the best physician in that part of the city. The address obtained, he went to it, related the same history to the physician which he had told the Manouris and paid him in advance for twenty visits, at the rate of twenty francs a visit.

He also recommended secrecy to the doctor, as he had before to the janitor, and his wife, of the house in which Jeanne and Cuchillo had taken refuge.

"Two hundred francs, on the one hand, four hundred on the other; that makes six hundred francs!" he said to himself, as he left the physician's. "If he dies, I am robbed; but, if he recovers—— I will manage to repay myself in some way or other. Now," he added, while directing his steps towards Neuilly, "let us look at the situation of affairs. I have provided for the most pressing and have not lost my day. I can now see what has taken place as clearly as if I had been present. Mariquita has put her fingers into the pie. Cuchillo, the idiot, has refused

to follow her. Then she departed, carrying off her daughter with her, and swearing that she would have her rights. She is, in fact, the true duchess, being Paul de Kandos' widow, and everything belongs to her. Cuchillo was afraid, believed himself lost, fled, his wife following him, and they have concealed themselves, hoping to be thought dead, so afraid are they of Mariquita's vengeance and tiger-like jealousy leading her to denounce her former lover." Here he paused, but soon resumed his soliloquy: "Denounce him? Well, she has not yet done that. And if she has not done so in the first moment of anger, it is because of some reason she has for not doing it." He reflected for a moment and then continued: "The danger, although different, is none the less certain. What are her plans? What is she waiting for? After all she loves him passionately! Yes, that is it! It is her love which holds her back! She does not wish to send him to the scaffold."

He began to feel slightly reassured.

"The idiot!" he repeated for the second time, as he thought of Cuchillo. "It was so easy for him to have returned with her. The 'little duchess' should not have been much of an embarrassment! She would have killed herself, certainly, but that would have been of little consequence."

He stopped a moment, for while he had been talking to himself he had also been walking rapidly, but in a few moments he again resumed both his walk and his soliloquy.

"So, the danger comes from Mariquita. She knows our secret and has a hold on us. So long as this is the case Cuchillo will be afraid and lost to me. Mariquita must be suppressed! Nothing is desperate yet, and her death will replace everything on its old footing." He knit his brows. "There still remains Annette, Mademoiselle de Kandos. Pooh! She loves Gaston. I will marry them, and she will hold her tongue. As for the 'little duchess,'

she has assumed the virtuous dodge, just now, but when she finds out what it is that constitutes the ordinary working woman's life—. Well, she will soon have had enough of poverty; if not——" and he terminated his thought with a very expressive gesture, as of snuffing out a candle. "And, so," he concluded, "everything reduces itself, for the present, to finding Mariquita and to reducing her to silence!" And he smilingly sneered.

During the next week nothing new occurred. No news from Mariquita.

The Manouris left nothing wanting to the comfort of Cuchillo or Jeanne, who blessed them, and whose blessings they accepted with the most touching exhibitions of good will.

The doctor was prodigal of his visits, but he did not pronounce as to the issue of the disease, which drove poor Louis Clermont to despair. If his Cuchillo should die!

The eighth day was the day of the crisis. Cuchillo would come out of it convalescent, or he would succumb, the physician had said.

Clermont would have liked to have been present so as to judge for himself, but he dared not present himself before Jeanne, so long as he felt uncertain of his position, that is, so long as he had no trace of Mariquita.

Despite his researches he knew no more of her present whereabouts than he had on the first day. Anger had turned to melancholy within him.

It was in one of these moments of suppressed despair and powerless fury that one of the servants of the family mansion, in which he had continued to live in order to prevent comment and suspicion among the household, handed him, exactly eight days after the scenes we have just described, a letter bearing the following inscription:

MONSIEUR BERNARD,
Steward of the Duke of Kandos,
Neuilly.

He tore open the envelope and read:

"If Bernard, the steward, has not forgotten an old friend, let him come to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, to breakfast with her at the hotel de ——, Saint Cloud.

"He will ask for Madame de Los Rios, and he will find the one who expects him!

"MARIQUITA."

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE SURPRISES.

THESE last eight days had been no less cruel for Gaston. Since the laconic note addressed to him by Annette he had received no further intelligence of the young girl.

Madame Lapierre had told him of her interview with the duchess, and had endeavored to make him share in her hopes for the future success of his love. At first, Gaston had taken her view of the state of affairs, up to a certain point.

If any great evil had befallen the de Kandos family, Annette's sudden departure and the tone of her letter might, in fact, be explained on other grounds than that she desired to escape from the man who loved her and thus break an engagement entered into in a first moment of enthusiasm.

But, still, in any case, she should have written to him again to appoint an interview. But, perhaps, she was ill—dead! And with the imagination of a young man and a lover, Gaston represented her to himself; sometimes, as forgetful of, and faithless to her lover; and, again, as on a bed of sickness, calling on him in vain, and rendering her last sigh, far away from him, with his name on her lips.

A trifling, but inexplicable event had greatly added to Gaston's troubled state of mind, and had,

at the same time, completely upset all of Madame Lapierre's preconceived theories.

Three or four days after the little duchess's visit, while Madame Lapierre was expecting to see her return with the work which she had confided to her, and Gaston spent most of his time in his mother's apartment in the hope of encountering Madame de Kandos there, the janitor brought up a package addressed to Madame Lapierre.

She recognized it immediately. It was the same she had given to Jeanne when the latter had come to ask her for work. She quickly opened it in her son's presence. Perhaps there was some letter or message inside. It contained nothing but the work Jeanne had taken away with her, and this work was unfinished! It had not even been touched! What does it mean?

Gaston descended the stairs like mad to ask the janitor who had brought the package and why he had not shown the person who carried it up stairs.

"Heavens, Monsieur Lapierre," piped the little man, "it was placed in my hands by a public messenger who left immediately."

"Without saying anything?"

"Pardon me!" He said: "Give this immediately to Madame Lapierre."

"And was that all?"

"That was all!"

It seemed incomprehensible; but, nevertheless, nothing could be simpler.

Jeanne, half mad beside her dying husband, could not work. She had neither the courage nor the time, passing her days and nights watching Cuchillo's every movement.

So, without taking the time to send a line of explanation along with it (and wanting for nothing, thanks to the generosity of the Manouris, which astonished her, but which she accepted, wishing before all else to fight for her husband with death, and indifferent as to the means) she had returned the

work given her by Madame Lapierre through the hands of a messenger, to whom she had recommended silence as to whence he came, and not to show himself to the person for whom the package was destined.

To those who did not know what had passed this conduct would have appeared inexplicable, and one can readily understand that it added greatly to the sufferings of Gaston and his mother.

Moreover, the young man believed that when he went out he was often followed—and by Louis Clermont. But when he had tried to assure himself of it the man had disappeared.

One can readily understand that the old scamp, in his constant quest of Mariquita, would not cease to keep a watch on the house in Trois-Couronnes street.

Annette, one day or another, would send information to Gaston and he would endeavor to see her, and would certainly succeed.

Things were in this state, therefore, on the morning of the day when Louis Clermont, overcome with joy, started off for the railway in order to comply with Mariquita's invitation.

"At last, I have her!" he said to himself. "The woman must be a fool to give me such a rendezvous! She throws herself into the wolf's mouth. *Carajo!* The wolf has good teeth, powerful jaws and a healthy stomach. He has digested grosser morsels without difficulty."

Still, he had some vague, momentary doubts.

"If it should be a snare?" thought he. "But what for? She can have no reason for mistrusting me or for wishing me evil! We have always been good friends. I have even felt a weakness for the creature——" and he sneered sardonically. "One is not perfect, after all! I see what it is. She has lost track of Cuchillo, and she wishes to pump me!"

At the same moment that Louis Clermont descended from the train at Saint-Cloud, and inquired the

address of the hotel indicated in Mariquita's letter, a quick ring was given at Madame Lapierre's door.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, The working-women were engaged at their labors under their employer's eye, and Gaston, who could not keep long in any one place, had just gone up to his garret. He now passed entire days there, away from his mother, before whom he forced himself to conceal the acuteness of his agony and despair. As for work, he no longer thought of it. His piano was a horror to him. He could no longer make any sense of his music. One idea filled and absorbed his brain: Annette!

When he had presented himself at Neuilly, after the receipt of Annette's letter, he had been told that the duke and duchess had departed for their *château* in *Franche-Comté*. He had not dared to ask anything in regard to Mademoiselle de Kandos. Great as was his horror of addressing himself to his father, he would have nevertheless ended by interrogating Louis Clermont. But his mother had told him that the latter had come to her for information in regard to the duke and duchess. Hence, it was useless to try and seek information from him.

He was in one of his eternal brown studies when he heard light steps in the corridor approaching his door. It was his mother, he knew her step. But she was not alone. Some one was with her.

He had heard the sound of the bell which we have already mentioned.

"Is some one coming to see me?" he asked himself, with that ennui and disgust at outside relations which one so strongly experiences under certain dispositions of the heart and mind.

There was a knock at his door.

"Is it you, mother?" he asked.

"Yes, open your door."

He did so, his mother entered, and behind her Gaston, lost in astonishment and believing himself in a dream, perceived Mademoiselle de Kandos.

This was so unexpected that he uttered a cry of surprise and staggered back, overcome by emotion, and not knowing it was joy and the realization of all his hopes which gave him such a feeling at his heart.

"Gaston," said Madame Lapierre in a voice trembling with emotion, "Mademoiselle de Kandos wishes to speak to you alone."

And, standing aside to allow the young girl to pass, she withdrew, without waiting for any reply, and closed the door on the two young people, who remained alone together.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT ANNETTE CAME TO TELL GASTON.

"ANNETTE! Annette!" murmured Gaston, hastening forwards. "You here! I cannot believe my eyes! I believed you were forever lost to me!" He seized her hands, which she freely yielded up to him. "Oh! forgive me! I even believed, for a moment, that you had forgotten me—— that you no longer loved me."

"No, Gaston, I did not forget you!"

"And you still love me?"

"Yes."

He clasped her in his arms in a delirium of joy, and then led her towards a chair, in which she seated herself.

He fell on his knees before her, drinking her in with his eyes, ready to laugh and to weep at one and the same time, only comprehending one thing, that she was there, with him, in his own room, and he did not weary of repeating this to himself or of clasping her little hands in his and covering them with kisses into which passed all the ardor of his heart. She let him go on this way for a few minutes, all the time bending over him and fondly gazing at him.

"But I have suffered very much!" she all at once said to him.

These words brought him back to a consciousness of the real state of affairs. His first emotion had somewhat passed off; he took a better look at her.

The young girl's face did, in fact, bear traces of suffering and fatigue which now struck Gaston for

the first time. Until then he had only been conscious of her presence and his own happiness.

"I am a fool, an egotist!" he exclaimed, with remorse. "I only thought of myself and my joy at seeing you again. Excuse me. It was my love that made me forget to question you. What has happened? Where have you come from? Why and how are you here?"

"Whence do I come?" repeated Annette, lowering her head and her voice, and her face covered with blushes. "I come from my mother!"

"Your mother! But your mother is dead!"

"No. She is alive!"

"I do not understand."

Mademoiselle de Kandos arose, in a state of great excitement.

"Listen, Gaston—that which I have to say to you, to explain to you, is cruel, terrible—" She stopped, and tried to still the beatings of her heart with one hand, while she rested the other on the young man's shoulder.

"Go on, speak!" said he.

"You remember why you refused to ask for my hand? Well, Gaston, our positions are reversed. It is my turn to blush, to hesitate and to refuse to become your wife as you refused to be my husband."

"Ah!" cried Gaston, "you frightened me for an instant. Yes, I understand. You are ruined. Well, I am glad of it! Your fortune was the thing which separated us the most. Now I no longer have any scruples. For I have the will and the strength to gain, by my own labors, another fortune for you, which shall belong to us both, and will give me the deep joy of being able to bestow something upon you, and of proving to you the extent of my love, in place of my having to receive everything from you."

Annette shook her head.

"No," said she, "Gaston, I am neither ruined, nor

even poor: I am still in possession of the same fortune."

"What are you saying? But, the duchess——"

"Gaston," she continued in a trembling voice, "my mother lives, but my father is dead, murdered——"

Gaston regarded her with terror. He asked himself if she had not suddenly become mad.

Then she rapidly related to him the main features and events of the long drama we have already related.

Gaston listened to her, in a state of surprise which almost deprived him of the power of reason.

It was all so unexpected, so improbable and so singularly complicated, that he became lost in trying to comprehend it, often asking himself if it was not all a dream.

"Still, little by little, the light broke in on the darkness which filled his mind. After the first stupor, he returned to his fixed idea as a lover, and said to himself:

"What is all this to me? It might make an ordinary lover recoil; but as for me, whom she once accepted, in spite of all, it is herself alone whom I love. The rest concerns me not!"

Annette continued speaking. She now related how, her mother re-found, she had gone away with her. But, in speaking of her mother, Annette lowered her voice, hesitated for words and appeared embarrassed. Suddenly, she stopped.

"Well, my well-beloved Annette," said Gaston, "what is there in all this to change your position toward me, and why will you longer hesitate to become my wife? It is all undoubtedly horrible and I understand and share your grief; but there is nothing in it all for which you are responsible. Are you not still the same noble young girl whom I have loved, do love and will love as long as my heart beats?"

"So, then, you do not comprehend the horror of

my situation? I pass for the daughter of this monster, this wretch, this Cuchillo!" And she swung her hands. "I hate this man. I shudder from head to foot on thinking that I could have lived near him and called him my father—my father who is still unavenged."

"You still have your mother left," interrupted Gaston.

"*My mother?*" repeated she, in such a strange tone that the young man trembled.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"My mother, yes, my mother!" said the young girl. "Oh! why have I found her?"

"Again, what does this mean?"

"Stay, Gaston; answer me frankly, sincerely. Forget that you love me and that I love you, forget all, and only remember the situation in which I am placed. What would you do, if you were in my position?"

"What would I do?"

He hesitated a moment.

Annette regarded him fixedly.

"You hesitate. You tell yourself, that, if I denounce this man and send him to the scaffold, there will be a great scandal, and disgrace will attach to the name of Kandos; that—"

"No, Annette. I would not be such a coward—"

He had become very pale.

"Well?"

"Well, I should avenge my father!"

"Of course! You would not leave this man to bear a name which he has picked up from the blood of Paul de Kandos?"

"No!" said he, again; but one could see that the answer tore his heart. "If it is on my account you hesitate," he continued, "do so no longer, but go on and act, Annette. I love you too much to lie to you or to deceive you."

"But you know that I cannot denounce and

strike this Cuchillo without doing the same to Louis Clermont !"

"I know it !"

There was a silence between the two young people, made for each other, who had believed themselves on the point of realizing happiness, and who hadjust pronounced their own condemnation.

Annette still gazed at Gaston, who no longer dared look at her.

With lowered eyes he was thinking, not of himself, but of his mother ; of her who had sacrificed her life in order to conceal the truth, and who was about to be struck by the same blow which threatened her husband, Louis Clermont. Still, he did not regret his response. What he had said to Annette was simply what he should have said. It killed all hope of a union between them ; for he could not marry her who would deliver over his father, no matter what the latter had been, to Justice. But the situation was so plain that his conscience had spoken above everything else. Mademoiselle de Kandos ought to avenge the dead and punish the guilty one. She could not consent to play the part of his daughter. That was simply impossible.

Suddenly Annette shook her head, and drew closer to Gaston.

"Look at me," she said.

He raised his eyes to her face, which was animated by both pity and resolution. One felt that, after a violent struggle, she had put an end, not to her trouble, but to all hesitation.

Gaston looked at her without weakness, but, also, without hope.

"Your conduct," she continued, "dictates mine to me. I cannot, nor do I wish to, nor ought I to accept your sacrifice; I have been cruel in questioning you. Pardon me for it. I have allowed you to see my anguish. It escaped my lips in spite of me, for, on coming here, I had already resolved *not* to act in the manner you have acquiesced in——"

Gaston questioned her with his eyes.

"You do not know all. Passion carried me away —a last protestation of my nature proved too much for my strength; but re-assure yourself, Gaston. I shall not denounce Cuchillo, provided he goes away and I see or hear nothing more of him——" She here again made a gesture of rage and anger, but she promptly repressed it. "All is said. Do not be afraid. Nothing threatens your father."

"What do you say, Annette?"

"I say that I will be as strong as you, that I love you as much as you do me, and that your answers have entirely effaced from my heart all desire for a most legitimate revenge."

Gaston gave a joyous start.

"But take good care," she added, bitterly, "and do not rejoice too soon."

"I do not understand you."

"This sacrifice on my part brings us no nearer each other!" she softly continued.

"How?"

"There is my mother!" said she, with a sob, which, in spite of all her efforts, mounted from her heart to her throat.

"Your mother! Is she opposed to us?"

"No! It was she who sent me here. I came by her advice, and in accordance with it, to ask an asylum and protection from your mother, until I can re-enter the world in my own name, that is, until we have found some way of arranging affairs, without compromising or betraying those who have been wrongfully bearing the Kandos name." She struck her hands against each other.

"It requires great precaution," she continued, wiping her eyes and stifling as best she could the sobs which tore her heart. "The least imprudence might ruin all. My mother charges herself with the arrangement of this—transaction—with regulating everything for the best; that is to say, in order that

silence and mystery may forever surround this horrible history."

"But, Annette, my dearest, do not weep thus, your despair kills me."

He approached her, and clasped her in his arms.

"Answer me, Annette. Why has your mother sent you here? Why did she not keep you with her?"

"Because that was impossible! We could not live together."

"You cannot live together?"

"Do not question me!—" Her voice stopped in her throat, and she concealed her face on the young man's shoulder.

"Annette, what ails you? You do not tell me all."

"Once more, do not question me," she quickly replied. "But my mother is a kind-hearted woman, and capable of great devotion. She has been honest with me. She has understood that we could not live near each other, that everything separates us, and that the greatest service she can render me is to not to attempt the impossible *role* of another, for which she was never intended. She knows that I love you, and that your mother is a good woman; she said to me: 'Go!' I came, and here I am."

"Annette!" murmured Gaston, with infinite tenderness, "why is it that your mother cannot keep you with her?"

"You shall know later on!"

He understood that here was another mystery, and that by insisting he would wound Mademoiselle de Kandos.

"But our marriage is impossible!" she continued, with an outburst of grief.

"On your mother's account? Still, if she is not opposed to it—"

"No, no, far from it, since she confides me to Madame Lapierre and to you. She desires this marriage—she—*It is I who oppose it!*"

"You!"

"Do you not see? do you not understand?" said Annette, making a visible effort, "that in order for us to marry, I should have to address myself to this man, to this Cuchillo who passes for my father, to obtain his consent, to make him play, yet once again, the part of Paul de Kandos, and, in short, *to become his accomplice?*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE following is what had taken place the day before, between Annette and Mariquita.

It was the eighth day since their re-union.

The *Porteña* had, towards evening, after having spent the whole day alone in her own apartment, entered her daughter's chamber.

The creole's face had no longer its usual expression. It was full of an unaccustomed gravity. Her eyes had lost that brilliancy and their glance that boldness, that readiness to brave anything, which generally characterized them.

She was very pale, but, nevertheless, calm; and there was a proud dignity and resignation about her which was particularly astonishing in this passionate and ardent woman. One would have even said that she had been weeping.

Annette regarded her with astonishment, so different did she appear from what she had generally been since circumstances had thrown them together.

"Annette," said Mariquita in a serious tone which was full of an almost sweet melancholy, "will you please listen to me with attention?"

"Before seeing you, I had experienced none of the feelings usual to a mother. I am sincere, you

see. I led a life of folly——. And I had not, perhaps, thought of you ten times since the day of your birth until I found you again a week ago. It is unnecessary to go into the question of whether this was wrong. I merely state a truth, that is all!"

Here she paused for a moment, Annette listening to her in silence.

"As for you, you loved me in imagination. You had created in your mind a type of mother very different from the real one. When you at last saw me the awakening was sudden and cruel!"

Annette made a gesture of protest.

"Do not interrupt me," quickly added the creole. "I know what you think of me. And I do not blame you for it. On finding your mother in the flesh you lost your ideal one. But it has come to this: that on finding my daughter, I felt that I could have loved her, that I was going to love her, that I did love her!"

Mariquita's voice was softened, and trembled with a sincere emotion.

"Now," pursued Mariquita, "in becoming a mother in sentiment I understand that I am unfit for one in reality, and that the best way in which I can prove my regret and affection to you is to part from you."

There was a short silence!

Annette dared make no denial, seeing that her thoughts had been so well divined, and seeing yet more closely into her own sentiments by the aid of the light which the *Portena* held up to her with such a firm hand.

"I cannot now change my past life," resumed Mariquita. "You do not know its details, but you have sufficiently well divined them. This life can meet with no indulgence from you. There ought to be no respect and esteem for the mother on the part of the daughter. You might, at the most have the affection. I would have known how to conquer that—but I should not, for your own sake. Besides,

there are other things which separate us. I am unable to share your hatreds. You know—"

She proudly raised her head and her black eyes became filled with quick flashes of provocation.

"You know that I love the man, of whom you do and can know nothing but his crimes."

Annette, in turn, had become hard and implacable on hearing this allusion to Cuchillo.

"We could never agree on this subject!"

She made a couple of turus in the room, and then returned and stood before her daughter.

"Annette," she kindly said to her, "you love Gaston Lapierre. I know the family. The mother is one of the best women in the world: she is a saint. You must marry her son. There, you will find happiness. And I will arrange matters so that it may be possible. Go to them. From them you will receive an honorable hospitality, and Madame Lapierre will be to you such a mother as I am not, as you have never had, and as I could never be—. In exchange, I ask a favor at your hands: Do not denounce Cuchillo. Let him live in the obscurity which he will henceforth seek!"

Her voice was tempered by tears.

"Do not denounce him," she resumed with emotion, "for my sake, who beg it of you, for hers, whom they call 'the little duchess,' and who is a noble creature, innocent of everything; for your own sake, in order to avoid a frightful scandal; and, last of all, for the sake of your future husband, for you could not strike Cuchillo without striking at the same time *his* father, Louis Clermont. If you will grant me this," added the Portena, "I will promise to do whatever shall be necessary to clear up the tragic and cruel situation in which you now find yourself." She advanced towards her daughter and took her by the hand. "If you accord me this, if, for this one time, you obey me! if you depart, tomorrow morning, you will have caused me the greatest joy that I can feel, from this time forth,

and I will bless the day on which I first knew you, although it was a terrible one!"

Her voice grew weak.

"I do not ask you to love me as I feel that I would have loved you—I only ask you to believe that I am sincere!"

* * * * * * * *

Before having this conversation with her daughter, Mariquita had written the following letter:

"CUCHILLO:

"I have unintentionally done you much evil. Or, rather, listening to nothing but my somewhat savage nature and carried away by passion, I threw myself across your life.

"I never dreamt that I could break your heart and compromise your existence. I only felt my jealousy.

"I loved you, Cuchillo, as I know how to love. I have never loved but you. I will never love but you. You, also, formerly loved me. I believed that with the breath of my passion I could re-animate the extinguished fire.

"I failed to kill you, but I have done worse. I have humiliated and dishonored you before her whom you love.

"No hatred, I know it now, could have struck you as cruelly as my blind love did. I regret it with all my soul, and I am severely expiating it.

"How good you were! Even at the moment in which I crucified you thus, in which I compelled you to make an avowal which I had not foreseen, at that fatal instant, not a word of reproach, not an angry glance proceeded from you.

"You are much better than I am.

"My only excuse is that I did not know how much you loved this woman, and was ignorant of how greatly you had changed.

"Henceforth you will live in a moral world, of which I am ignorant and into which I have never put my feet, and which I have only had a few glimpses of within the last few days.

"You have sometimes said that I was cruel and even slightly ferocious. This is true! But I am not wicked. Your tears have moved, mollified me. Your despair has pierced my heart.

"And then, I have regained my daughter. Poor child! The sight of her, her looks, her words, her first caresses and her coldness have taught me what a stranger I am to a certain existence and how unworthy I am of entering it. I no longer have the right to be her mother!

"Mariquita, I have been; Mariquita I am; and Mariquita I will remain.

"All is over between us.

"Pardon me. Your pardon is all I now ask of you.

"Preserve my memory. Recall to yourself, sometimes, without anger and without contempt, the foolish girl who has thrown her life to the winds, but who never gave her heart but to you. Do not be too severe on her waywardness and her vices. She also had other qualities. Think of them, and keep in some very obscure corner of your heart a poor little remembrance of her, which you will say nothing of to anyone.

"You will never see me again! Nor will you hear me spoken of! So you may rest without fear.

"Cease to conceal yourself. Your secret shall never be revealed by me.

"I will try and get Annette to observe the same silence, and, if I cannot do it myself, I will get the man whom she loves, Gaston Lapierre, to do it for me.

"Your safety is therefore secured. I will occupy myself with it, and I shall succeed.

"I do not know what you will decide to do, but I

am sure that you will not resume the name and title of Duke of Kandos.

"But you are still young and strong, and have near you a woman who adores you. She will complete her work. And you will be able to recommence, with her, a new existence. That it may be a happy one, is the most ardent desire of her who was once

"YOUR MARIQUITA."

* * * * * * * *

This letter finished, the creole had placed it in an envelope, which she had carefully sealed, without writing any address on it.

Then she had called Mono.

"Mono," she had said to him, "take this letter. It is for Cuchillo."

"Very well, mistress."

"I do not know where he at present is."

"He has left the house at Neuilly."

"Yes, I know it. But that is all I know. Tomorrow morning, at nine o'clock, you will leave Saint-Cloud with Mademoiselle de Kandos, to whom I am about to speak."

Mono opened his eyes very wide.

"You will take her to Madame Lapierre's."

"Trois-Couronnes street?"

"That is right. You will not leave her until she is with that lady."

"And then, mistress?"

"Then, you will seek for Cuchillo, without compromising him, until you find him——"

"And, then?"

"You will give this letter to him; to him alone."

"I understand, mistress."

"But be sure and remember this: You are not to return until after you have found Cuchillo and have given him the letter."

"It may be a long time!"

"No matter. Let it be days, weeks or months—but find him."

"I will find him!"

"You will need money for this search. Wait a moment!"

She went to a small secretary, opened it, and pulled out a drawer, in which were some bank-notes, the last of the proceeds of the sale of her jewels. There were eight notes, of a thousand francs each. She took seven of them.

"These are for you," said she.

"But, mistress, it is too much! And yourself?"

"Oh! I have other resources," said she, smiling. 'You can bring back what you have not spent. But I do not wish that you should be hindered by the lack of money."

"I will obey. Is this all?"

"Yes."

She hesitated a second.

"No," said she with some effort, "I wish to ask a service of you."

"Command me! You know that it makes me happy."

"You are young, Carmencita is pretty; marry her!"

"I! marry a white woman!"

"She is not white! She is a half-breed, a *china!*"

"I do not love her, mistress. I loved— her whom I avenged, and for whom I still weep. And, then, I love you as much as a slave may love one who is so far above him. Any other woman but you would fly from me!"

"I desire it, Mono! It will please me. I want you to render her happy, do you hear, and she must believe that you love her——"

"Mistress, I conjure you——"

"Do this for me, Mono!"

"I will do it——"

"I have your word. That is sufficient. Thanks!"

She held out her white hand to him, and he fell on his knees and kissed it.

His eyes were full of tears, and Mariquita's were also moist.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARIQUITA'S BREAKFAST.

THE next morning, at ten o'clock, Mariquita was alone. An hour earlier Mademoiselle de Kandos had departed, accompanied by Mono.

The parting between mother and daughter had been a trifle cold and very constrained.

Mariquita, determined on separating from her daughter, was unwilling to give way to any feeling of tenderness.

And Annette, determined on accepting this separation, combatted the weakness she felt taking possession of her, particularly since their last conversation.

At bottom, Mademoiselle de Kandos was profoundly touched, and experienced, for Mariquita, a badly defined sentiment, which was not yet, perhaps, very filial, but which was already sympathy, and would have soon become love.

They embraced each other, however, with a warmth which betrayed them, although their lips remained silent. But Mariquita promptly disengaged herself, and Annette, not knowing what to say, or not daring to think aloud, silently went away.

By the orders of the *Porteña*, a delicate breakfast was served in her chamber. There were two covers, and fine wines. As for the rest, it was a cold breakfast.

"I expect a guest," she had said to the proprietor of the hotel. "We will wait on ourselves. Let

everything we shall need be carried in before we begin. I will ring if I need anything."

The preparations finished, Mariquita slowly promenaded up and down the room, often stopping to listen. Her face wore a singular expression. Never had her dead-white complexion been more animated, nor her eyes more brilliant. And, yet, her glance had something profound and melancholy, without being weak, about it, which was not at all usual with her.

We should also say that she had sent away Carmencita on some message which would take her to Paris and detain her there until evening.

At a quarter past ten a step was heard on the stairway which led to her chamber. She paused, and turned suddenly pale.

The door opened, and Louis Clermont was ushered in by a servant.

"Leave us," said she to the latter, "and do not return unless I ring."

She then advanced towards the old convict and tendered him her hand. Clermont had entered with a strained and contracted look on his face. His false and roving glance took in all the surroundings. Evidently there was a suspicion in his mind of some possible ambush.

The peaceful aspect of the room, joyously lighted up by the sun; the smiling picture of the loaded table; and the way in which Mariquita (who was certainly alone) received him—all tended to re-assure him. He took the hand she had offered him, with a smile which was still slightly forced, but more confident.

"*Carajo!*" said he, "but I am glad to see you, Mariquita! I have been long enough looking for you!"

"I have my doubts about that!" said she, laughing. "But, we will have an abundance of time for conversing while we eat, for you must be hungry, and we have a great deal to talk about!"

"Very well!" said the old rogue, and he seated himself unceremoniously before the table, with a visible eagerness.

Mariquita took the seat opposite to him.

"The deuce! But you live well!" exclaimed he, admiring the arrangement of the repast, and expanding his nostrils. "All the delicacies of the season!"

"I know your tastes, and treat you as a friend."

"You are charming! I have always had a weakness for you."

"As I have for you."

"But why is there nothing warm?"

"So that no one can disturb us!"

"She is an angel!" thought Clermont. "I could not have arranged matters better myself."

And his left hand cautiously went to his vest pocket as if to assure itself of the presence of something which ought to be there. Satisfied with the result of this search, he placed his hand upon the table.

"Stay! before you taste anything else, try a little of this white wine! It will sharpen your appetite."

Saying which, she poured out of a bottle placed near her a glass of golden colored wine, and handed it to him.

"What is it?" asked Clermont; but before she could answer he had put it to his lips. "Good morning! Sauterne! and the very best!"

"You are at home there!"

"Your health, Mariquita!" And he emptied his glass at a single draught, becoming a different man and a *gourmet* both at once.

Mariquita had followed all his movements with a lively interest; and she uttered a sort of sigh when he replaced his glass on the table, and a slight shudder agitated her beautiful body while her cheeks became a trifle paler. But this was all.

"Don't you ever drink?" asked the old scamp,

"No, you know that I never drink anything but water."

"That is true! A creole custom."

"Now let us converse!"

"Very well!" replied Clermont, with his most gracious air, while doing honor to the dishes with which she served him. "You know," he resumed, his mouth full, "that you have made me the unhappiest man on all the earth, and that you have caused me to pass through a week which will count in my life."

"How is that?"

"How! 'How is that?' By Jove! You are not ignorant, I suppose, of what you have done?"

"Certainly not. And I regret it!"

"Indeed!"

"On my word, I do!"

"It is rather late! The evil is already done!"

"By our lady! Mariquita does not like to be trifled with!"

"Nor does Clermont intend that anyone shall play the devil with him, which is what you have been doing!"

"I?"

"Speak, shall we be frank?"

"Certainly!"

"It was very well played, I will agree to that. And you fooled me nicely? It was the first time, and it shall be the last. No! I shall never forgive myself for having believed in your pretended resignation and the contemplated departure for America."

"That proves that you do not know me."

"Does one ever know women! But why, after having concealed yourself from me, have you sent for me?"

"Because I need you."

"That is frank! Well and good! What do you want?"

"Cuchillo's address!"

"That is what I thought!" said the ex-convict to

himself, but he exclaimed aloud: "This is marvelous! Why, that was the very thing I was going to ask of you!"

"You do not know it——"

"*Carajo!* I am looking for him, and do not know what has become of him! Ah! you played me a villanous trick there, my dear child! But that is past! You have no intention of denouncing us, I suppose?"

"Not the least in the world! Only, I love Cuchillo——. I wished to get even with this other woman, to separate him from her."

"Well?"

"Well, I did not succeed. He has fled with her, and I do not know where they are."

The breakfast was nearing its end.

"Pass me a little dessert," said Clermont.

Mariquita arose in order to bring the fruits placed on another table, and, in doing so, turned her back to her guest.

This lasted only a moment; but that was sufficient.

Clermont had hastily taken from his vest pocket a small paper, which he opened, and the contents of which he poured into the *Porteña's* glass.

When she returned with the fruit, the ex-gaucho was quietly whistling an operatic air and gazing at the ceiling.

"Come!" he resumed, "let us touch glasses, even if you drink nothing but water; otherwise, I shall believe that you nourish some evil design against Cuchillo, who is very dear to me, as you know."

"You mean that he is your banker."

"It is the same thing."

They struck their glasses each against the other's, and Mariquita emptied hers at the same time that Clermont did his.

"You see?" said she, showing him her empty glass. "This re-assures you, I hope!"

"Oh! completely!" sneered the old galley-slave.

There was a moment's silence.

"Now," he resumed, "is the time for explanations. What do you wish?"

"To find Cuchillo again, as I have told you. And I hoped that you had discovered his retreat."

"I haven't the least idea of his whereabouts, and, even if I had, I would not tell you!"

"Why not?"

"Because Louis Clermont does not like to have anyone mix in his little affairs, nor to run against his wishes, present or future."

He gave a sneering laugh as he said this and assumed a threatening air.

CHAPTER XX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER!

MARIQUITA also commenced to laugh, with a mocking air, which made the defiant old rogue rather uneasy.

"Why do you laugh, *señora?*" he suddenly asked, placing his elbows on the table.

"Because I see more and more that you do not know me, *señor caballero.*"

Louis Clermont frowned and shrugged his shoulders.

"*At present,*" he strongly emphasized the words, "this matters little."

"It matters always, when one wishes to play the game you play, and when one receives such a check as I gave you!"

"You wish to have your finger in the pie? Eh, well, you shall not!" replied Clermont, laughing in his most cynical manner.

"Pshaw! The pie is mine. I am the only duchess. But that is not the question."

"Indeed!" said Clermont, more and more inclined to laugh. "If the money is not the question, then what is?"

"Cuchillo!"

Clermont exploded with laughter.

"Well, my dear, if it is he whom you want, you will never get him. He is in love with another woman and would fly to the end of the earth in order to remain with her and escape from you——"

"I know it!"

"And I being his friend, am resolved to put an end to this flight, which tears my heart."

"Mine, also!"

"Let us see, what do you hope for? To catch him again? To blackmail him? To say to him: Your love, or your life! Choose between me and the guillotine! Would you force love? There are men who would prefer the galleys, and I believe that he is one of them."

"Certainly! And so I do not ask for his love, but for his happiness; I no longer desire his caresses, but his tranquility."

"You!"

"Listen, Clermont. You have never loved, and therefore cannot understand these things, but love is so constituted that when it is carried to extremes it borders on the highest abnegation. Complete love is composed of devotion and sacrifice."

"I don't understand you!" sneered the convict.

"It means that I love Cuchillo enough to no longer think of myself and to work with my own hands in order to assure his happiness with another."

Clermont regarded her like one saying to himself: "Has she gone mad?"

"No," answered Mariquita, reading his thought. "I am in my right mind. Only, I am the offspring of love, and it is therefore in my blood to love, as I do "As for my father, whom I never knew, he must have been a coward to desert my mother as he did, and I attribute whatever of evil there is in me to him."

"Very flattering to him, I am sure. What was the gentleman's name?"

"My mother never knew his real name. On the *campo* they had nicknamed him Juan Espada."

"Juan Espada!" exclaimed Clermont, pushing back his chair violently. He stood up and had become mortally pale.

"You know this man?" asked Mariquita, her eyes flashing with anger and hatred. "This man who

caused my mother's death, who deceived her, and abandoned her to misery and despair!"

"What was your mother's name?" murmured Clermont.

"Conception Rioja!"

"God's thunder! why have you never told me this?" yelled the old man, his face covered with a cold perspiration.

"I never happened to mention her name. Besides, what is it to you?"

"*Carajo!*" repeated the old galley-slave. "What is it to me? Why, *I* am Juan Espada!"

Mariquita became livid, in turn, and staggeringly arose.

"And so you are——"

"Your father! Yes!"

Both mute, they now stood looking at each other. Suddenly Clermont rushed to Mariquita's glass, seized it and turned it upside down.

"She has drank it all!" said he, letting the glass fall to the floor, where it was broken into fragments.

"You are my father! You are Juan Espada!—You are—I did not know it—if I had only known—. Eh, well! after all, it is done and it is only justice!"

He regarded her, his face working violently.

"Mariquita," he at length murmured, "I did not know—I have poisoned you!"

"You!"

"Yes—if I had only known—it was useless—we could have come to an arrangement. The fortune is yours, since you are Paul de Kandos's widow. I would have shared with my daughter, instead of with this imbecile of a Cuchillo——"

"Ah! you have poisoned me!" repeated Mariquita, slowly. "Do not regret it too much. I had decided to die. I was going to stab myself, when you were gone, with this."

She drew forth a small triangular bladed knife, with a point like a needle's.

"You were going to kill yourself?"

"Yes, because I could not live without Cuchillo, and in order to rid my daughter of such a mother as Mariquita."

"What stupidity!" exclaimed Clermont. "And there is no antidote!" he added. "We could have arranged things so well together."

"Yes, we would have shared Paul de Kandos's fortune, would we not? Well, in place of that, we will share the same death!"

"Hey!"

"I say, Juan Espada, that I have poisoned you also, in order to free Cuchillo, at one stroke, from all whom he could fear and in order to assure the marriage of Annette with Gaston Lapierre, your son."

"Malediction! I! poisoned!—by you!—wretch!"

"Father, I am your daughter, and 'all's well that ends well."

She staggered, and pressed her hands to her chest.

"Oh! God!—forgive me—I am choking—my heart ceases—the poison—Cuchillo—adieu!"

She turned around slowly and fell to the floor.

Weaker than Clermont, she was the first to experience the effects of the terrible poison which she had given to Clermont and which he had also administered to her.

As for him, he stood motionless, already petrified by terror, and looked about without a cry or gesture.

What good to call for help? What use to struggle?

He knew the poison used by himself and his daughter; a poison which had no antidote in Europe, and one which never failed!

Besides, paralysis was already taking possession of him, and the will was extinguished before life.

For five minutes more, he remained standing, his face livid, his hair on end and his eyes fixed and glassy; then he, in his turn, sank to the floor, mak-

ing an effort, even in his dying agony, to utter a last oath, which expired on his rigid lips.

* * * * * * * *

An hour later, when a servant of the hotel, astonished at the prolonged silence, entered the apartment, he found nothing but two corpses.

EPILOGUE.

ON that same day Cuchillo came out a conqueror in his battle with Death, and he entered on his convalescence. It was long and painful.

Through the newspapers Jeanne learned of the deaths of Mariquita and Louis Clermont. She was careful not to tell Cuchillo; but, feeling more assured, she dared to return to Madame Lapierre's in search of work.

There, she met Annette, in full mourning and weeping sincerely for her whom she had known such a short time and of whose admirable devotion she had only had a few glimpses.

"Jeanne," said she to the "little duchess", who was regarding her with hesitation, "I will always love you."

"Thanks!" said Jeanne, deeply moved. "But we must see each other no more! Our ways, henceforth, are separate. There is an abyss, not between our hearts, but between our two lives."

"What is to become of you?"

"When he whom I love, and whose wife I am," she replied, with a sweet firmness, "is strong enough, we shall depart for Australia."

"With whom! You have no money—" timidly interrupted Annette.

"I have already arranged it. We shall leave, in a few weeks, with an English couple who need a

governess for their children and an overseer for their cattle-ranch."

Annette felt that it was useless to insist. Besides, what could she say to this noble woman? Offer her half of her fortune? Jeanne would have refused, and it would have humiliated her. She could not, being Cuchillo's wife, accept!

The two woman embraced each other and wept together.

When the "little duchess" left, carrying away with her enough work to occupy the remaining weeks she was to be in Paris, Gaston offered her his arm to accompany her, for which act Annette thanked him with a glance.

As soon as they were alone together in the street, he said:

"Madame, what can I do for you?"

"This, Monsieur Gaston: marry Mademoiselle de Kandos."

"How can I? Certain formalities are necessary—"

"Which are repugnant to her," interrupted Jeanne. "I understand. But she will consent, later on, because she loves you."

She felt in her pocket.

"Here are all the necessary papers: Here is the consent of the Duke of Kandos. This is the last time," she quickly added, "that Jean Pruneau, my husband, will ever use that name. Take these papers, Monsieur Lapierre. Some day, Annette will be glad that you have them, without being obliged to ask for them. Deposit them at the mayor's office; when she quits wearing mourning for her mother, she will ascept the accomplished facts."

"Madame, you are a saint! But what is the life that awaits you?"

"The most beautiful of all, my friend: a man to save and to console! My part is the best. *Adieu!*"

And she hastened away and soon disappeared around the nearest corner, while Gaston's eyes fol-

lowed her with a look of profound and respectful admiration.

A year later Annette de Kandos married Gaston Clermont, and accompanied by Madame Clermont, happy for the first time in twenty years, they left Paris for Franche-Comté.

About the same time a creased envelope reached Cuchillo, in Australia, where he was courageously earning his living and redeeming his past, guided and sustained by Jeanne.

This envelope contained Mariquita's letter.

Mono, after a long search, had at last got on the track of Jean Pruneau, and had learned where he lived. Faithful to the promise he had made his mistress, he sent her letter to Cuchillo. The latter, with many sobs, read it in Jeanne's presence.

"Well," said his wife to him kindly, with tears in her own eyes, "weep for her. Remember her, as she requests. I will never be jealous of her. She loved you—as much as I do; and I love you well enough to love whoever has loved you."

[THE END.]

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS, CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

[64/5.85/P 96]

Stirling, June 1890.

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